半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 14

BAD BLOOD

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

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Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

DARK HORSE MANGA™

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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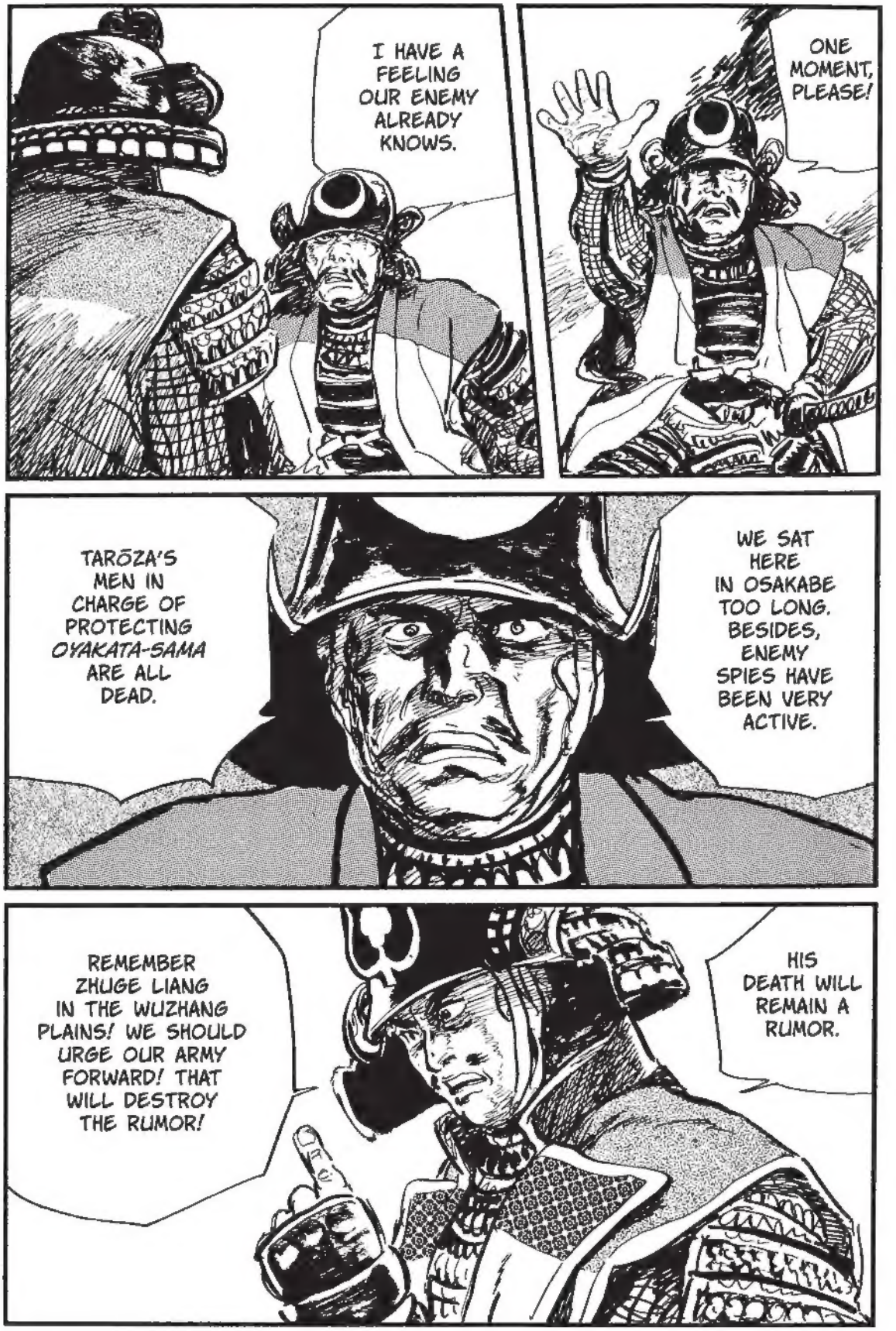
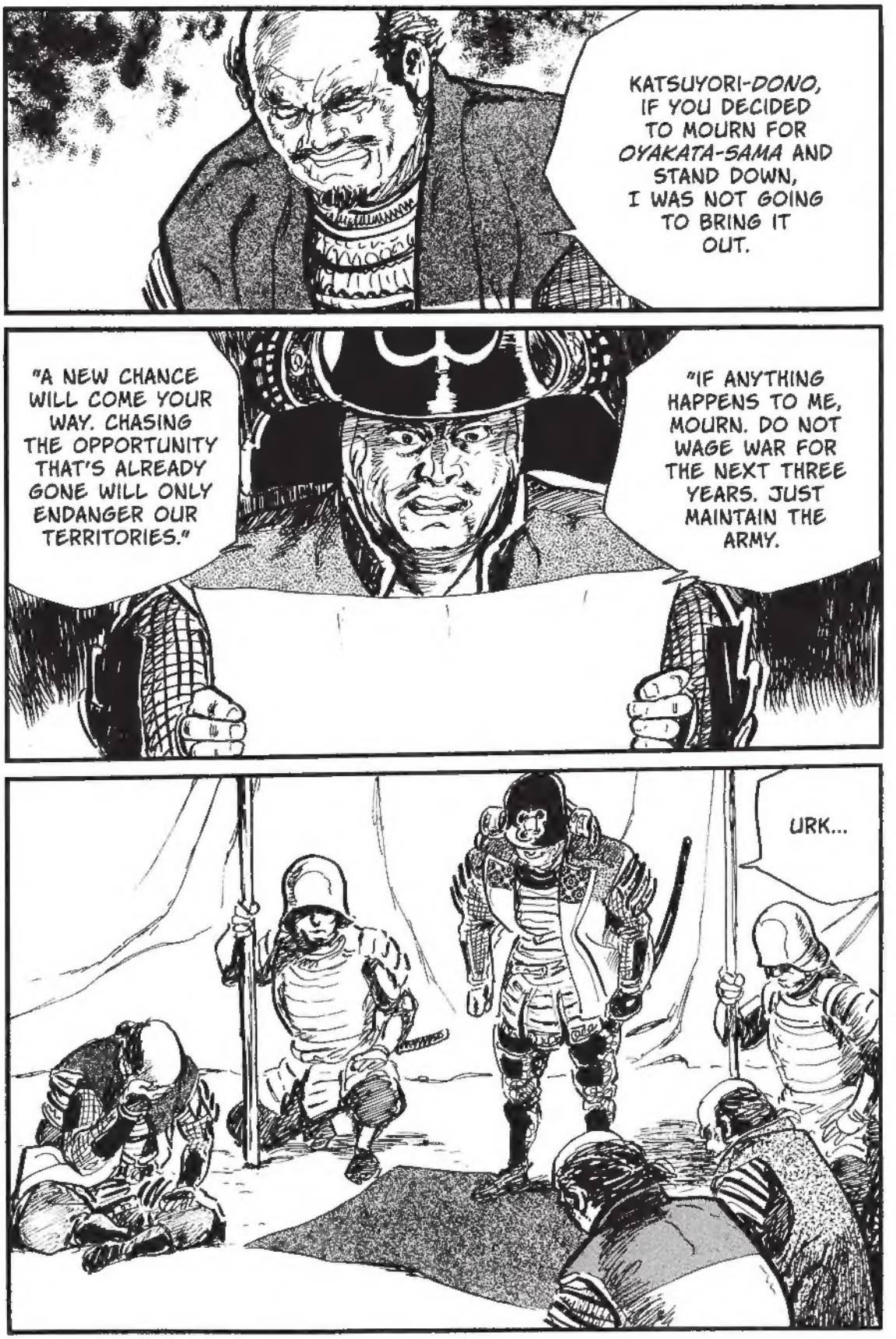
Chapter on Hikkyō Jiei No. 2: Three Court Ladies Part 2

FORTUNATELY, NOT MANY ARE AWARE OF HIS DEATH.
I WILL FOLLOW MY FATHER'S DYING WISHES! WE'LL CONTINUE MARCHING WEST AND TAKE CONTROL OF THE NATION!
IF WE PULL BACK NOW, WE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO LEAD OUR ARMY TO THE CENTER. THAT WOULD GO AGAINST MY FATHER'S WILL!
KEEP THE MATTER QUIET. USE *KAGEMUSHA*. TAKEDA SHINGEN IS STILL GOING STRONG. WE'LL FLATTEN IEYASU UNDER OUR FEET AND HIT THE CAPITAL LIKE A RAGING STORM!


I HAVE A FEELING OUR ENEMY ALREADY KNOWS.
ONE MOMENT, PLEASE!
TARŌZA'S MEN IN CHARGE OF PROTECTING *OYAKATA-SAMA* ARE ALL DEAD.
WE SAT HERE IN OSAKABE TOO LONG. BESIDES, ENEMY SPIES HAVE BEEN VERY ACTIVE.
REMEMBER ZHUGE LIANG IN THE WUZHANG PLAINS! WE SHOULD URGE OUR ARMY FORWARD! THAT WILL DESTROY THE RUMOR!
HIS DEATH WILL REMAIN A RUMOR.

IF WE PULL BACK NOW, THE RUMOR WILL BECOME REAL, AND IT MAY EVEN LEAD TO OUR OWN DEMISE DOWN THE ROAD!
DON'T SAY THAT, MASA-KAGE!
BUT HE IS RIGHT, SIR.
EVEN IF WE USE *KAGEMUSHA*, EVERYONE WILL KNOW *OYAKATA-SAMA* IS DEAD IN NO TIME. THERE'S NO WAY OUT OF IT, KATSUYORI-*SAMA*, ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'LL WIELD THE *SAIHAI*!
HOW ARE WE GOING TO RAISE THE MORALE OF OUR WHOLE ARMY?

I HAVE HIS WILL.
UNCLE, YOU TOO?!
BUT UPON SETTING OUT WEST, *OYAKATA-SAMA* SECRETLY LEFT IT WITH ME JUST IN CASE.
INDEED, IT WOULD BE BETTER IF THERE WASN'T ONE.
HOW CAN THIS BE WRITTEN ?!
MMM...IT IS INDEED WRITTEN BY MY FATHER...


KATSUYORI-*DONO*, IF YOU DECIDED TO MOURN FOR *OYAKATA-SAMA* AND STAND DOWN, I WAS NOT GOING TO BRING IT OUT.
"A NEW CHANCE WILL COME YOUR WAY. CHASING THE OPPORTUNITY THAT'S ALREADY GONE WILL ONLY ENDANGER OUR TERRITORIES."
"IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO ME, MOURN. DO NOT WAGE WAR FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS. JUST MAINTAIN THE ARMY.
URK...

MMGH...
I, YOMI, HAVE COME TO YOU, SIR.
IS THAT YOU, THREE COURT LADIES?
I, KIYO, HAVE COME TO YOU, SIR.
I, MIKI, HAVE COME TO YOU, SIR.

AND KILL HIM!
HUNT THE MAN WHO KILLED MY FATHER TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH!
TSUKIBUE TARŌZA IS ALSO MISSING. TRACK HER DOWN.
IF YOU FAIL, HE WILL BECOME A THREAT TO TAKEDA IN THE FUTURE. UNDERSTAND?!
AND ONE MORE THING. TERMINATE IEYASU.

THANK YOU, SIR. WE'LL MAKE SURE WE SUCCEED.
I WOULDN'T EVEN MIND PUTTING YOU IN CHARGE OF ALL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES IN KAI!
IF YOU SUCCESSFULLY CARRY OUT THESE MISSIONS, I WILL TAKE KIYO AS MY CONCUBINE, AND ALL OF YOU WILL GAIN MORE IMPORTANCE.
HMM.

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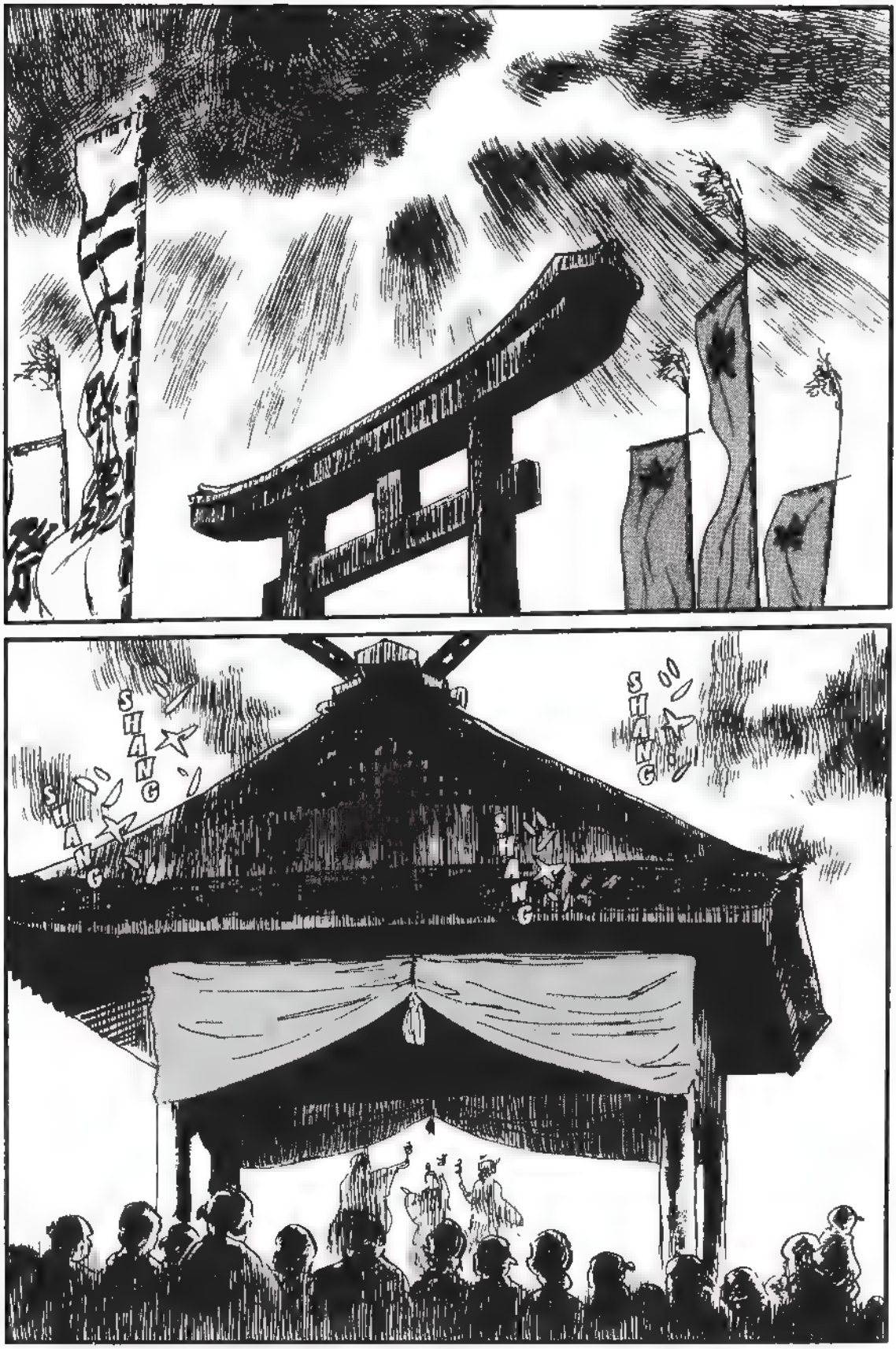
SHANG
SHANG


SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG

WHERE IS TARŌZA?
SPARKLED
GLINT
WHERE IS TARŌZA?

OHHH!
SHANG
シャン
SHANG
シャン
SHANG
シャン
WHERE IS TARŌZA?

APPARENTLY, THEY KEEP SHOUTING "WHERE IS TARŌZA."
I HEAR THERE ARE THREE *MIKO* IN OUR PROVINCE WHO TRAVEL FROM SHRINE TO SHRINE, PERFORMING *KAGURA*.
THREE... COURT LADIES...

WHAT?!

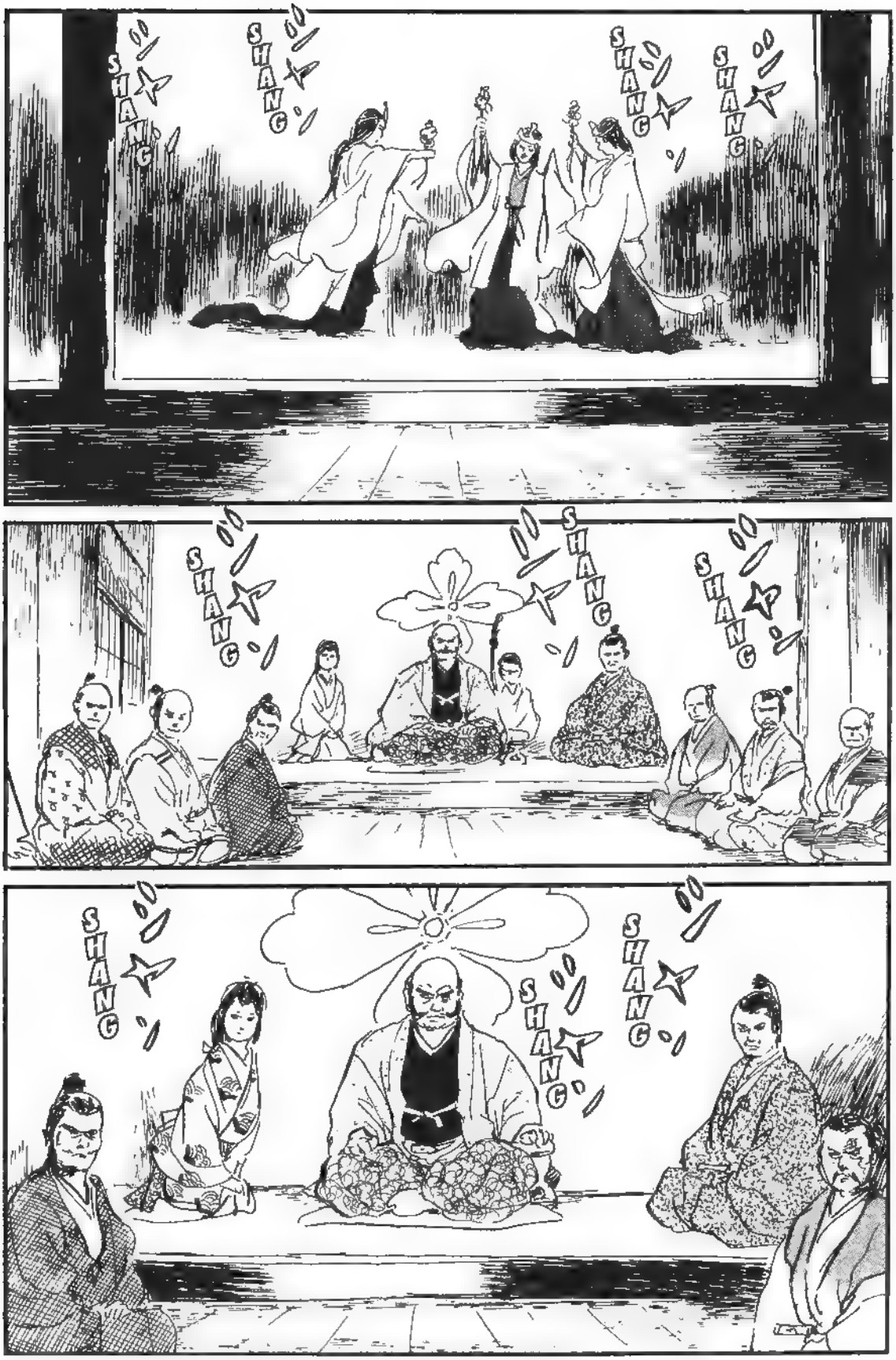
THEY ARE IZUNA SORCER-ESSES.
THREE COURT LADIES? ARE THEY SUPPA?

HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF SOME STRANGE RUMORS, THEY HAD TO LEAVE KYOTO AND GO TO SUWA TAISHA. BUT THE WEIRD RUMORS KEPT UP, AND EVENTUALLY THEY WENT MISSING.
THEY USED TO WORK IN THE IMPERIAL COURT. BEING GREAT DANCERS, THEY WERE ALSO CALLED THE THREE DANCING SISTERS.

TAKEDA KATSUYORI SUMMONED AND HIRED THEM, BUT SHINGEN DID NOT LIKE THESE WOMEN.
PEOPLE USED TO TREMBLE WITH FEAR, SAYING THAT WHEREVER THE THREE COURT LADIES DANCED, DEAD BODIES LAY IN HEAPS.
THERE WAS TOO MUCH STRANGENESS ABOUT THEM. SHINGEN THOUGHT IT WOULD BE TERRIBLE IF THEY TURNED AGAINST TAKEDA.
IT SOUNDS LIKE KATSUYORI KEPT THEM INSTEAD.
SO I BELIEVE HE SECRETLY ORDERED KATSUYORI TO KILL THEM OFF, BUT...
I'VE HEARD OF IZUNA SORCERESSES WHO BEWITCH PEOPLE.
MOST LIKELY.

I'VE SEEN THEM PERFORM ONCE
FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, THE ORIGINS OF THEIR ART CAN BE TRACED TO EN NO
KAI'S DANCE PEARED AS ATE KAI WAS ALSO AN IZUNA SHAMAN
IT WAS FRIGHTENING AND PROFOUNDLY MYSTERIOUS

SHA
SHA
SHANG
CHRANG
RANG


SHANG
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SHANG
SHANG

SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHOW US THE MYSTERIOUS DANCE WHICH CAUSED THE DISPLEASURE AND WRATH OF HIS HIGHNESS.
SHOW US THE UNEARTHLY MOVEMENTS WITH WHICH YOU TRIED TO CHARM THE EMPEROR.
SHANG
SHANG
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SHANG
SHANG

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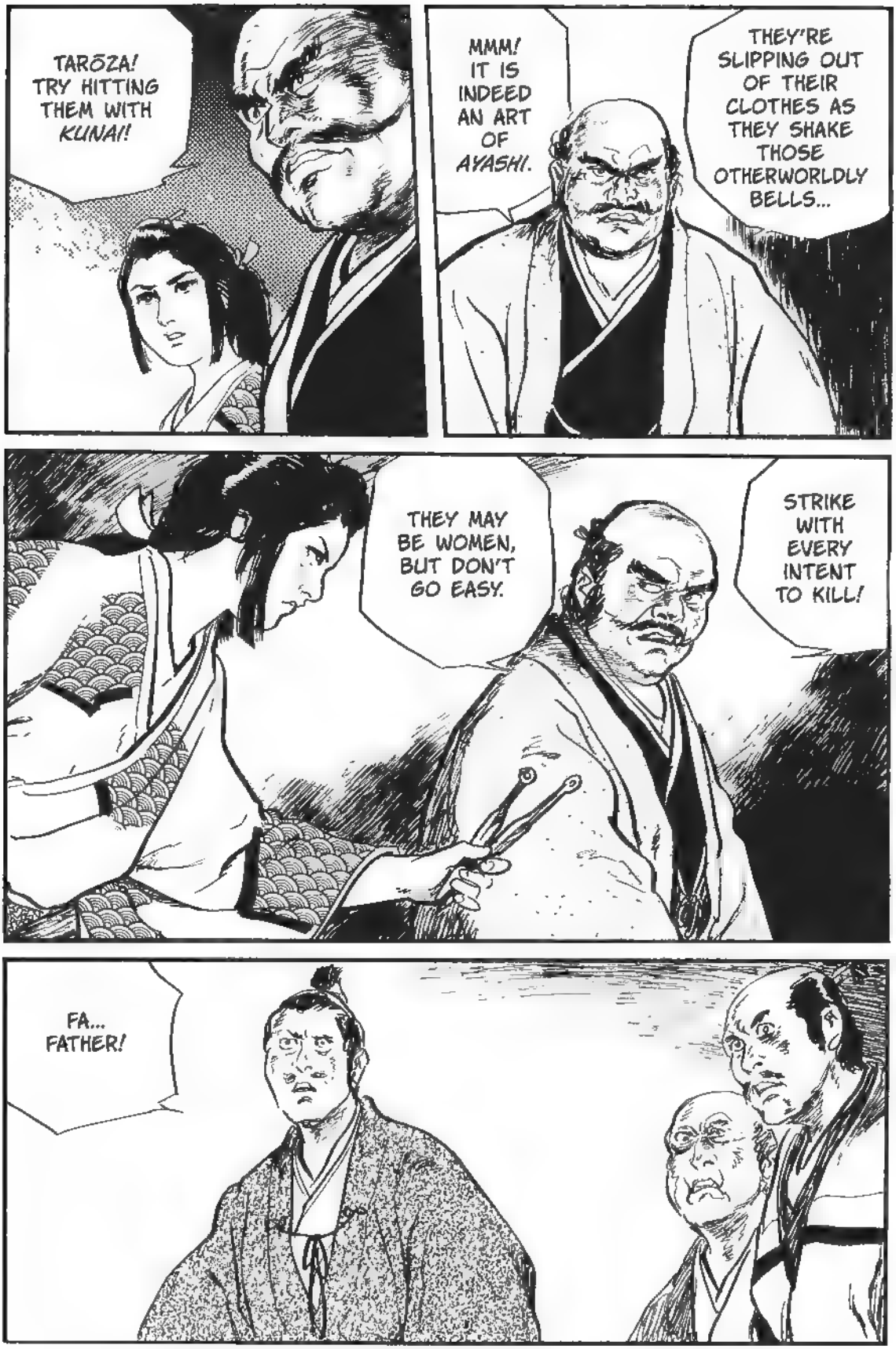
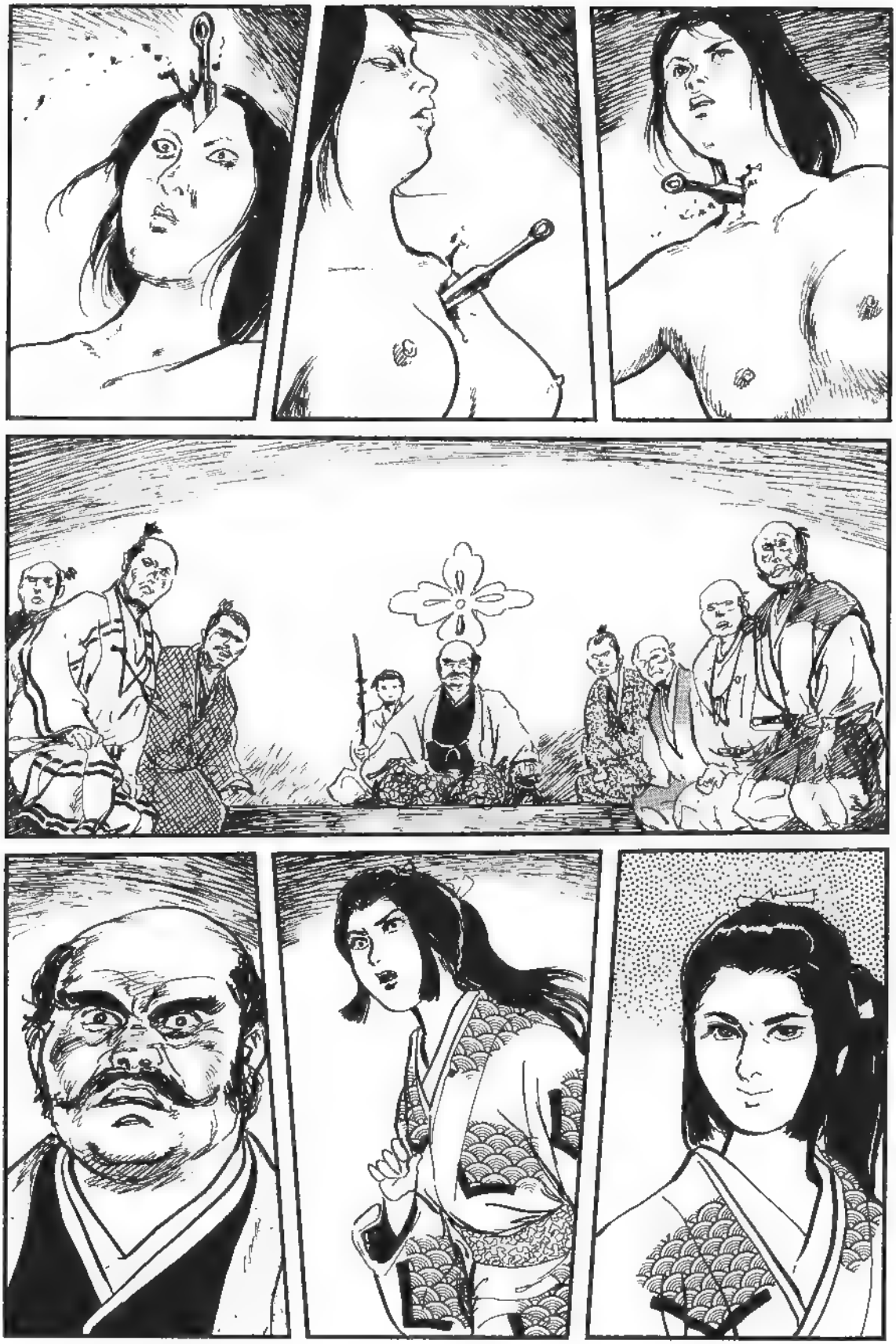
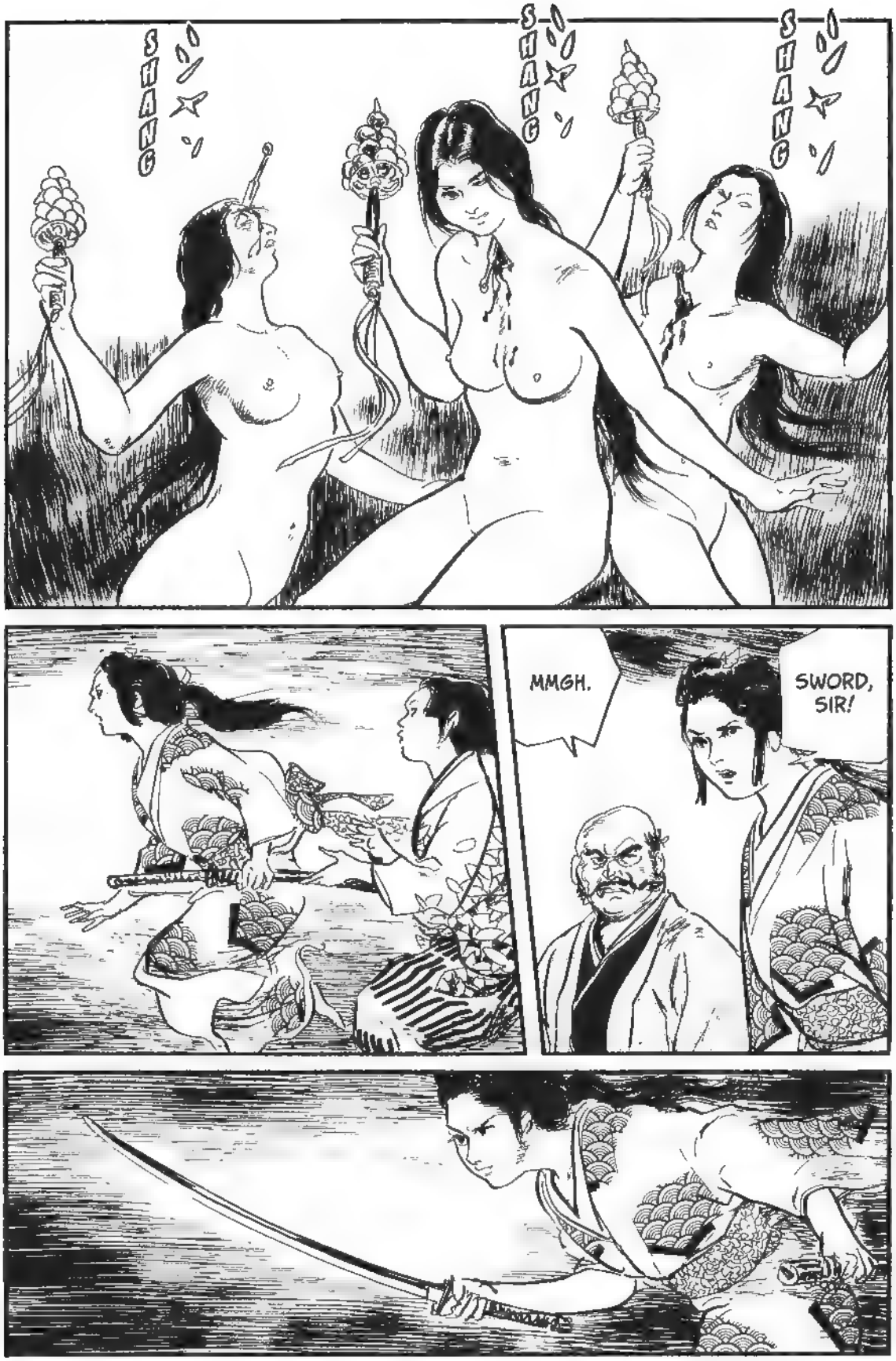
SHANG
HM! EXCELLENT!

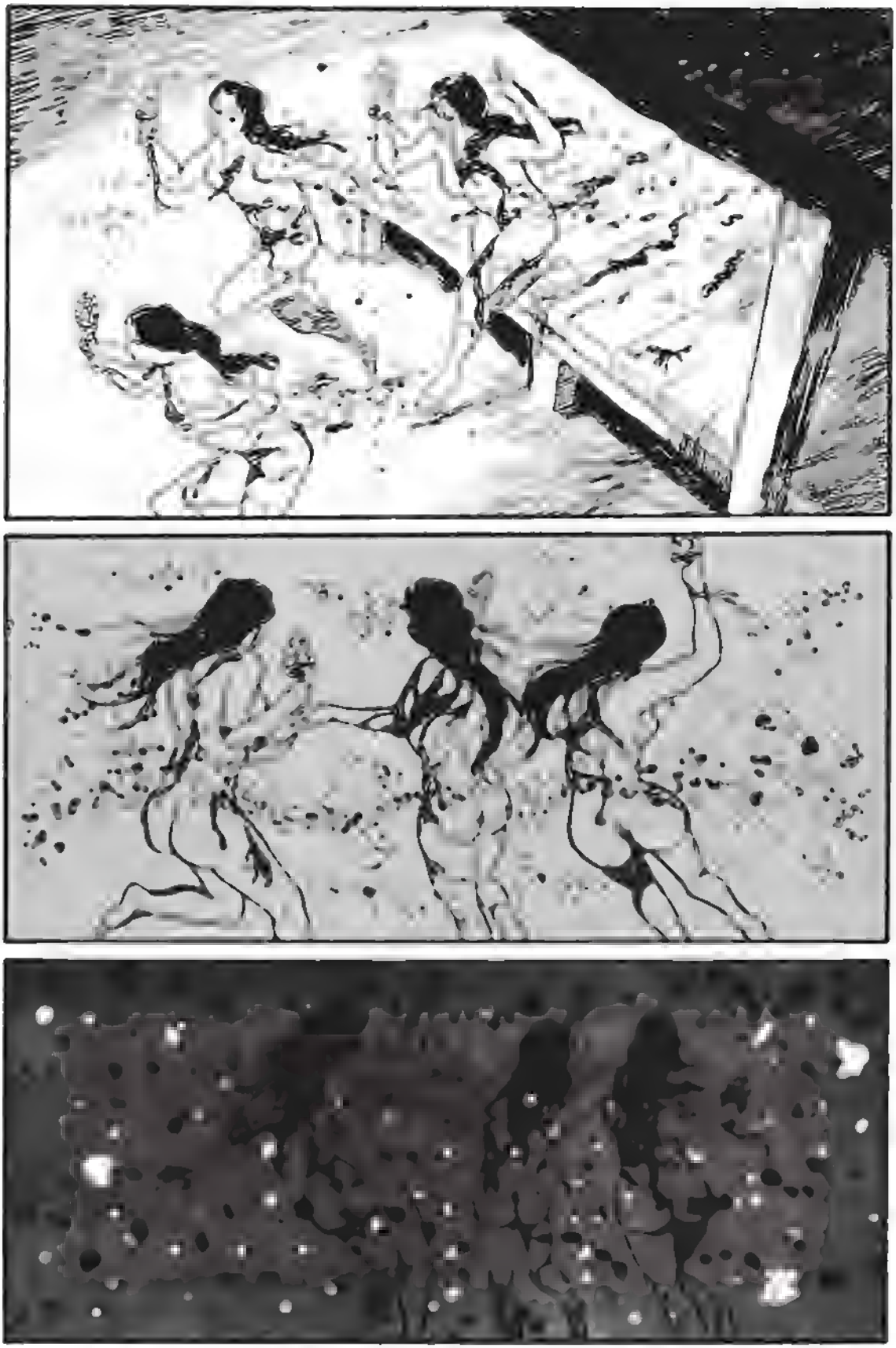

TARŌZA! TRY HITTING THEM WITH KUNAI!
MMM! IT IS INDEED AN ART OF AYASHI.
THEY'RE SLIPPING OUT OF THEIR CLOTHES AS THEY SHAKE THOSE OTHERWORLDLY BELLS...
THEY MAY BE WOMEN, BUT DON'T GO EASY.
STRIKE WITH EVERY INTENT TO KILL!
FA... FATHER!

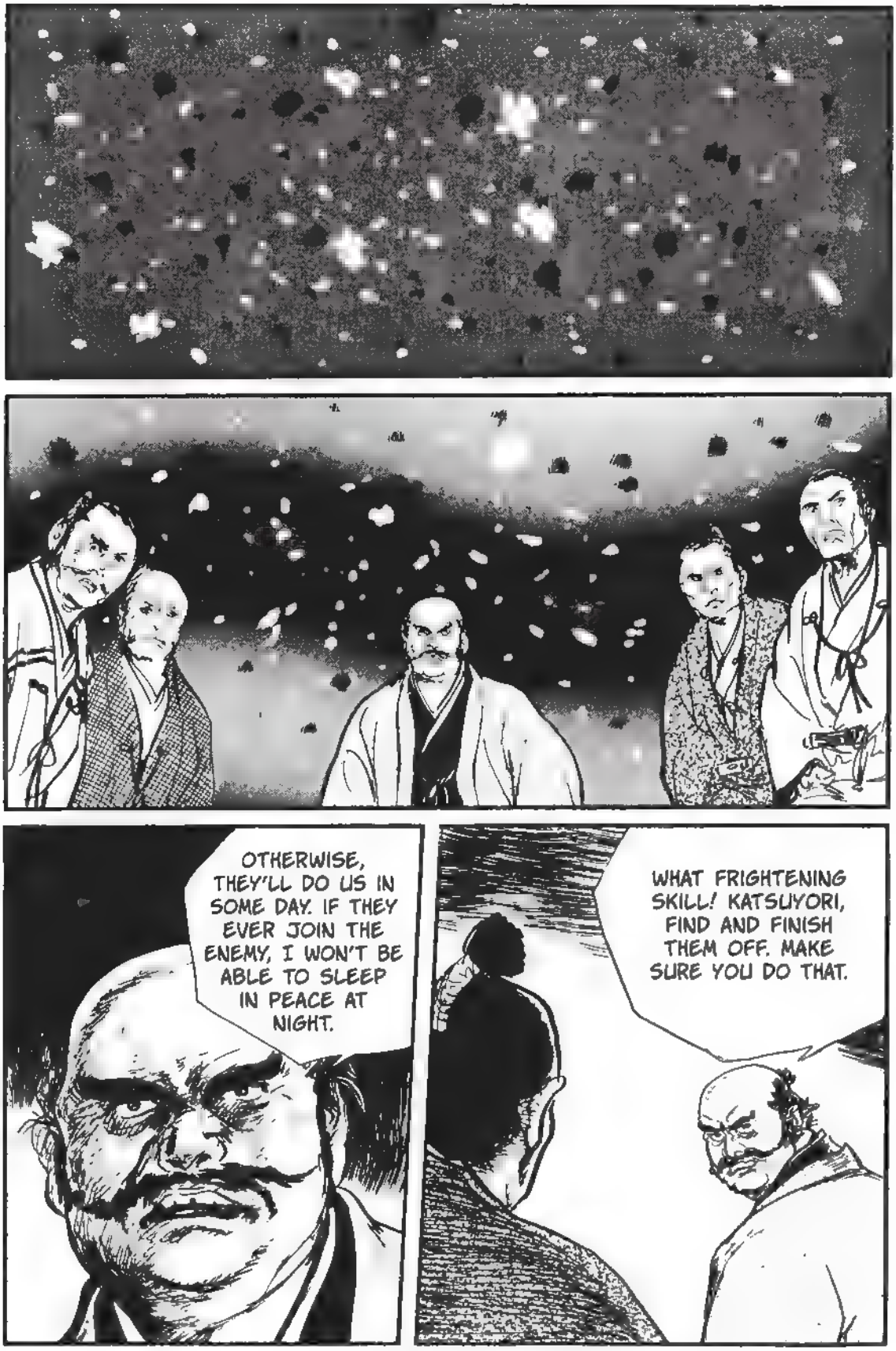
TARŌZA!!
BUT I CAN'T BEAR TO SEE YOU TAKEN IN BY WOMEN LIKE THEM.
THEY'RE VERY MUCH THE KIND YOU ENJOY.
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
YES SIR.

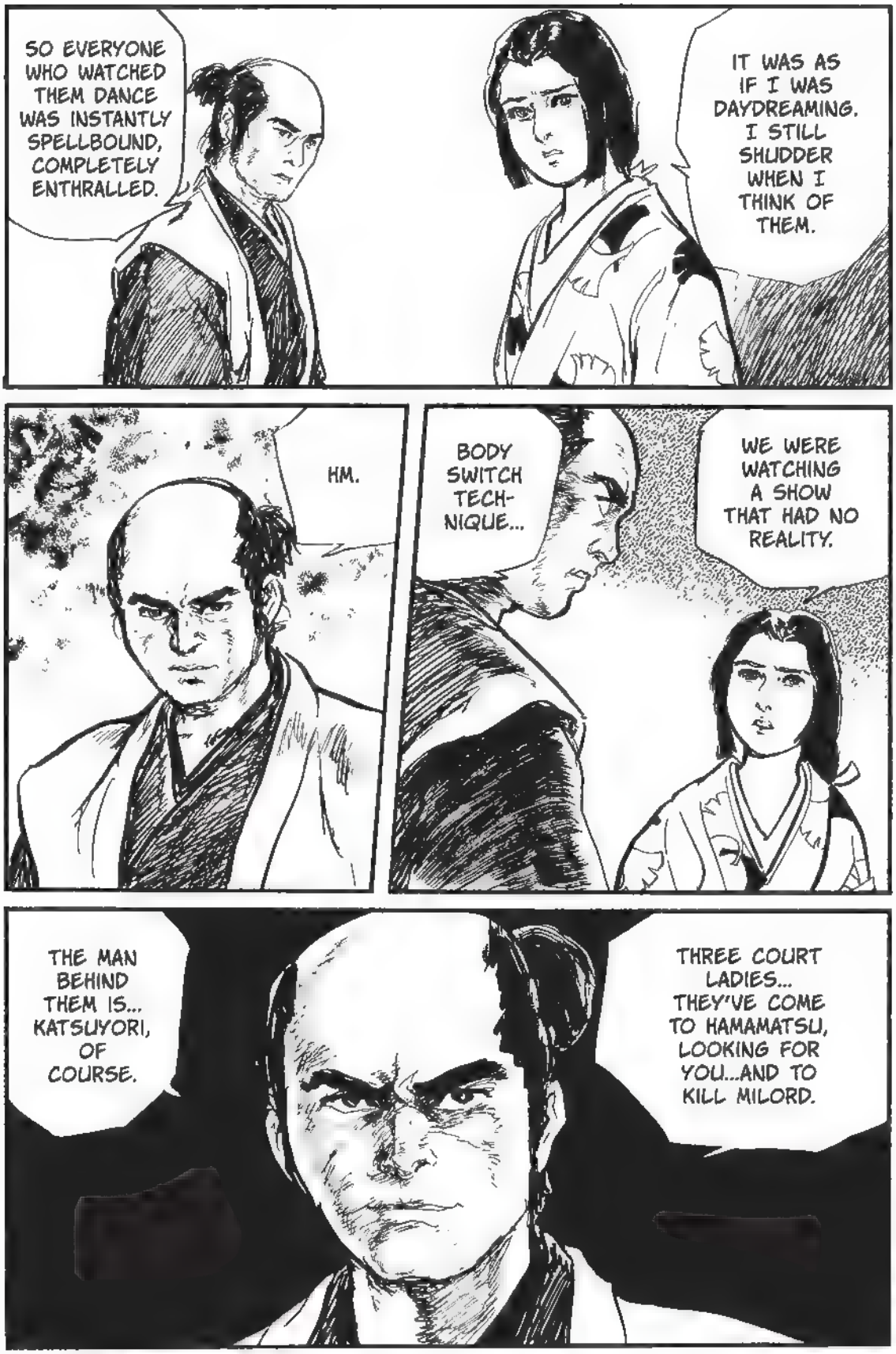



SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
MMGH.
SWORD, SIR!

SHLUKK
CHUCK
SHLUKKK
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG




OTHERWISE, THEY'LL DO US IN SOME DAY. IF THEY EVER JOIN THE ENEMY, I WON'T BE ABLE TO SLEEP IN PEACE AT NIGHT.
WHAT FRIGHTENING SKILL! KATSUYORI, FIND AND FINISH THEM OFF. MAKE SURE YOU DO THAT.


SO EVERYONE WHO WATCHED THEM DANCE WAS INSTANTLY SPELLBOUND, COMPLETELY ENTHRALLED.
IT WAS AS IF I WAS DAYDREAMING. I STILL SHUDDER WHEN I THINK OF THEM.
HM.
BODY SWITCH TECH-NIQUE...
WE WERE WATCHING A SHOW THAT HAD NO REALITY.
THE MAN BEHIND THEM IS... KATSUYORI, OF COURSE.
THREE COURT LADIES... THEY'VE COME TO HAMAMATSU, LOOKING FOR YOU...AND TO KILL MILORD.

SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG

I GAINED A VALUABLE EXPERIENCE WHEN I FOUGHT KITE KATŌ.
FIRST, THE SOUND.
THEN, THE MOVE-MENTS.
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
THE SOUND REPEATED IN A CONSTANT INTERVAL... AND THEIR SHOWY DANCE. THAT'S WHAT BEWITCHES PEOPLE.
AND THE EYES OF THE SORCER-ESSES.
WITH THEIR STRANGE GLEAM, THEY DRAW YOU IN. ENTRANCED BY THOSE GLISTENING EYES, PEOPLE GIVE THEM TOTAL CONTROL.
BUT I WON'T LET THEM.
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG

JUST AS WE PLANNED.
GRANNY, I'M COUNTING ON YOU. YOU CAN'T SEE NOR HEAR. AS SOON AS I SHAKE YOUR BODY, YOU'LL START COUNTING TO ONE HUNDRED AND THEN PULL MY EARS WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT.
FIVE, SIX, SEVEN...
ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR...
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG

SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
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SHANG

SHANG
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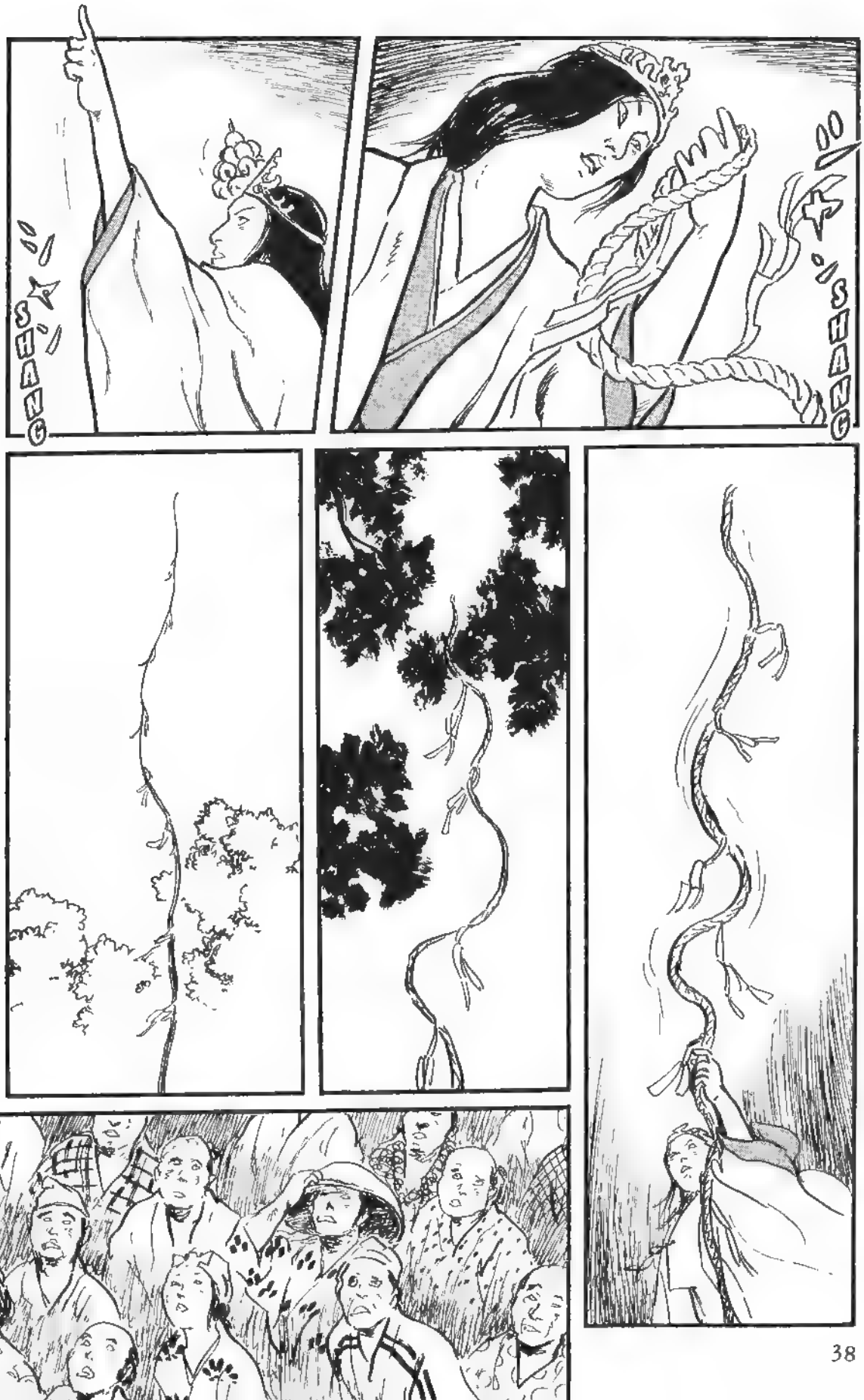
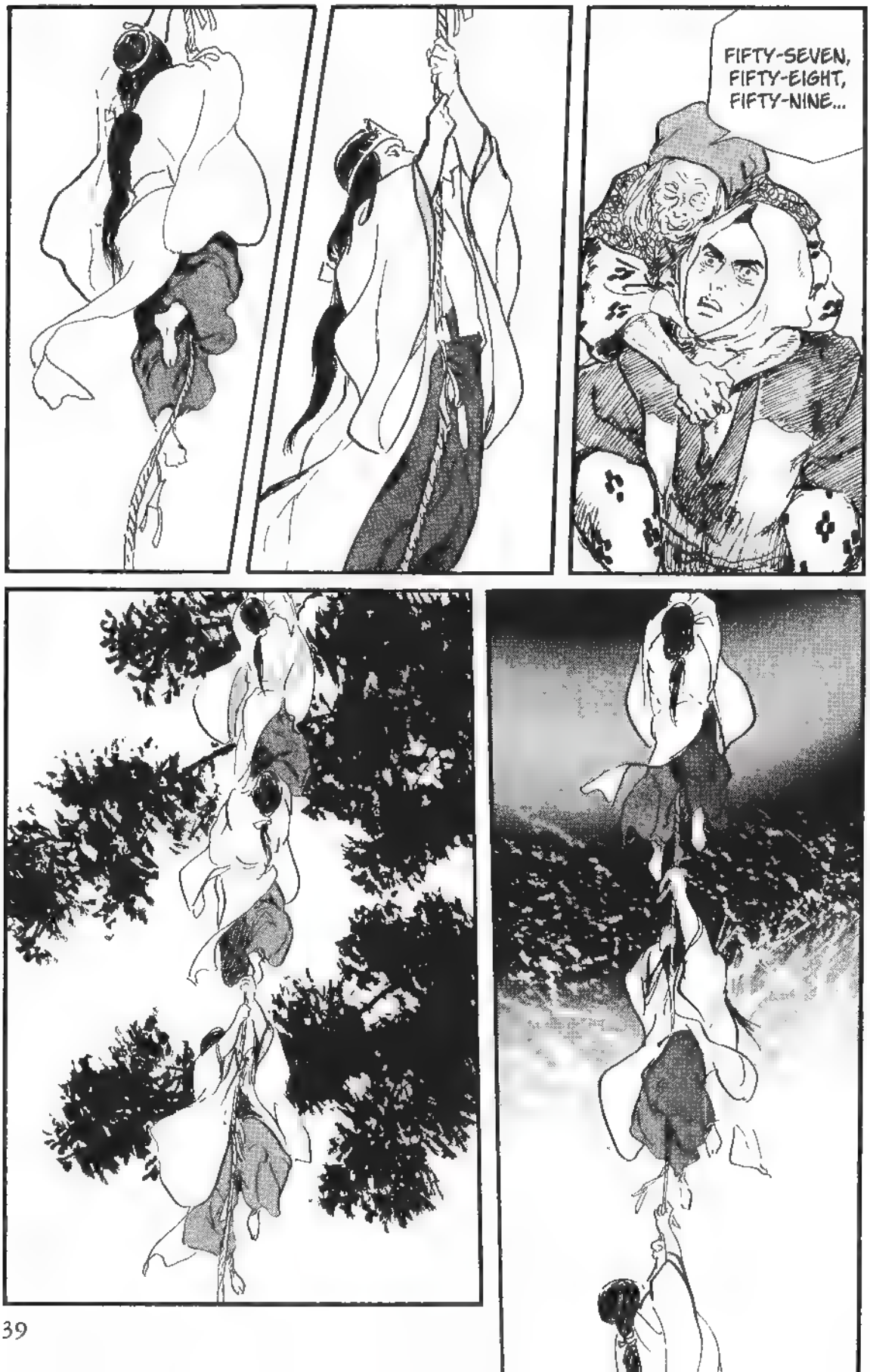
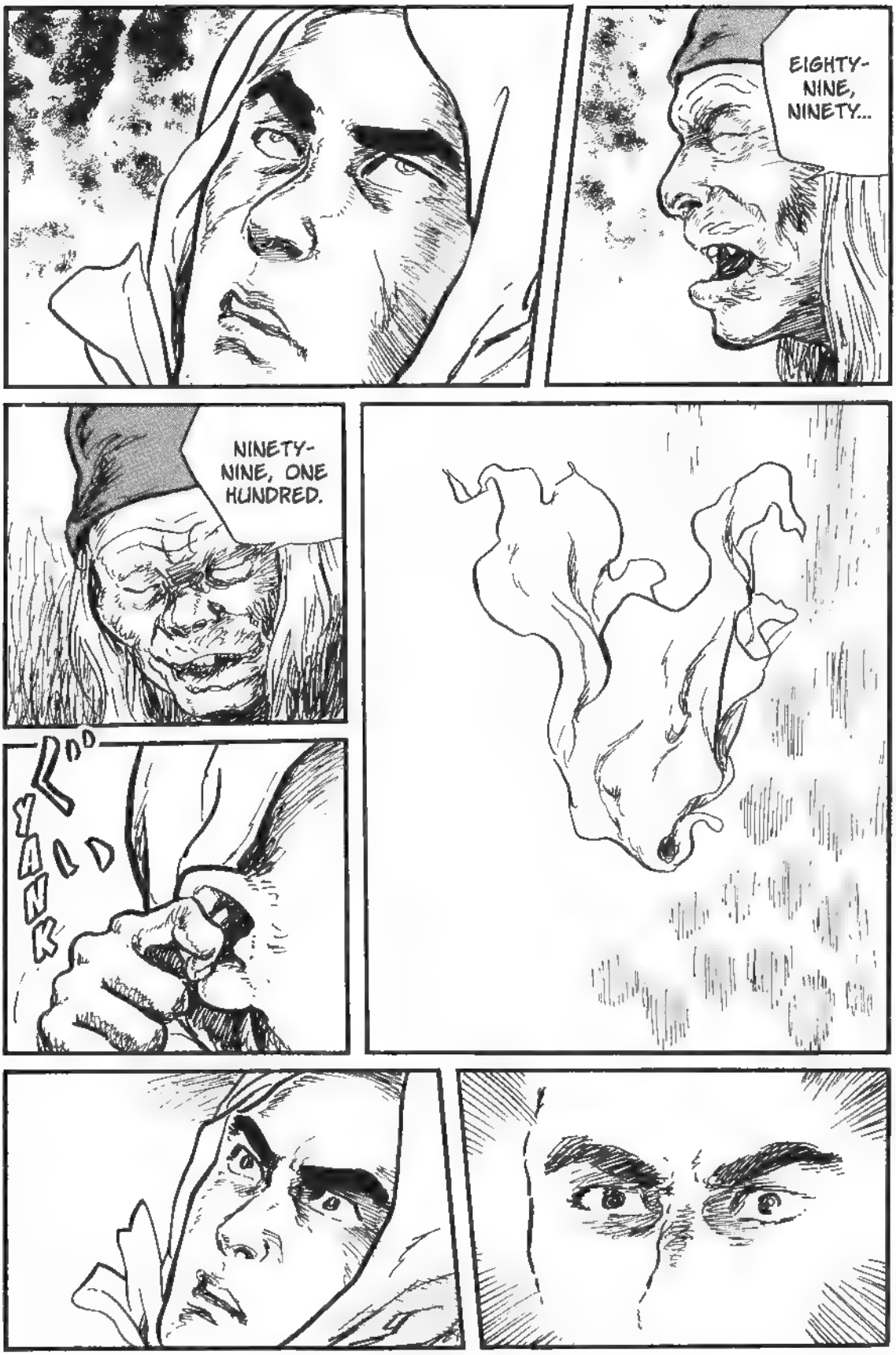
SHANG


SHANG
SHANG


FIFTY-SEVEN,
FIFTY-EIGHT,
FIFTY-NINE...


EIGHTY-NINE, NINETY...
NINETY-NINE, ONE HUNDRED.
YANK

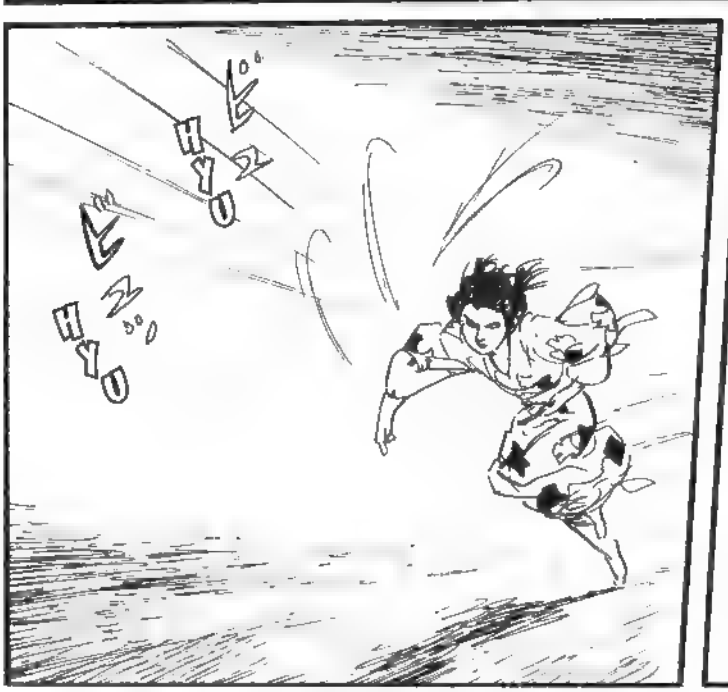
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
MMG.

WITH MY EARS PLUGGED AND MY EYES SHUT...IF I FOLLOW AND FIGHT THEM ONLY BY FEELING MY WAY AFTER THEM...
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG

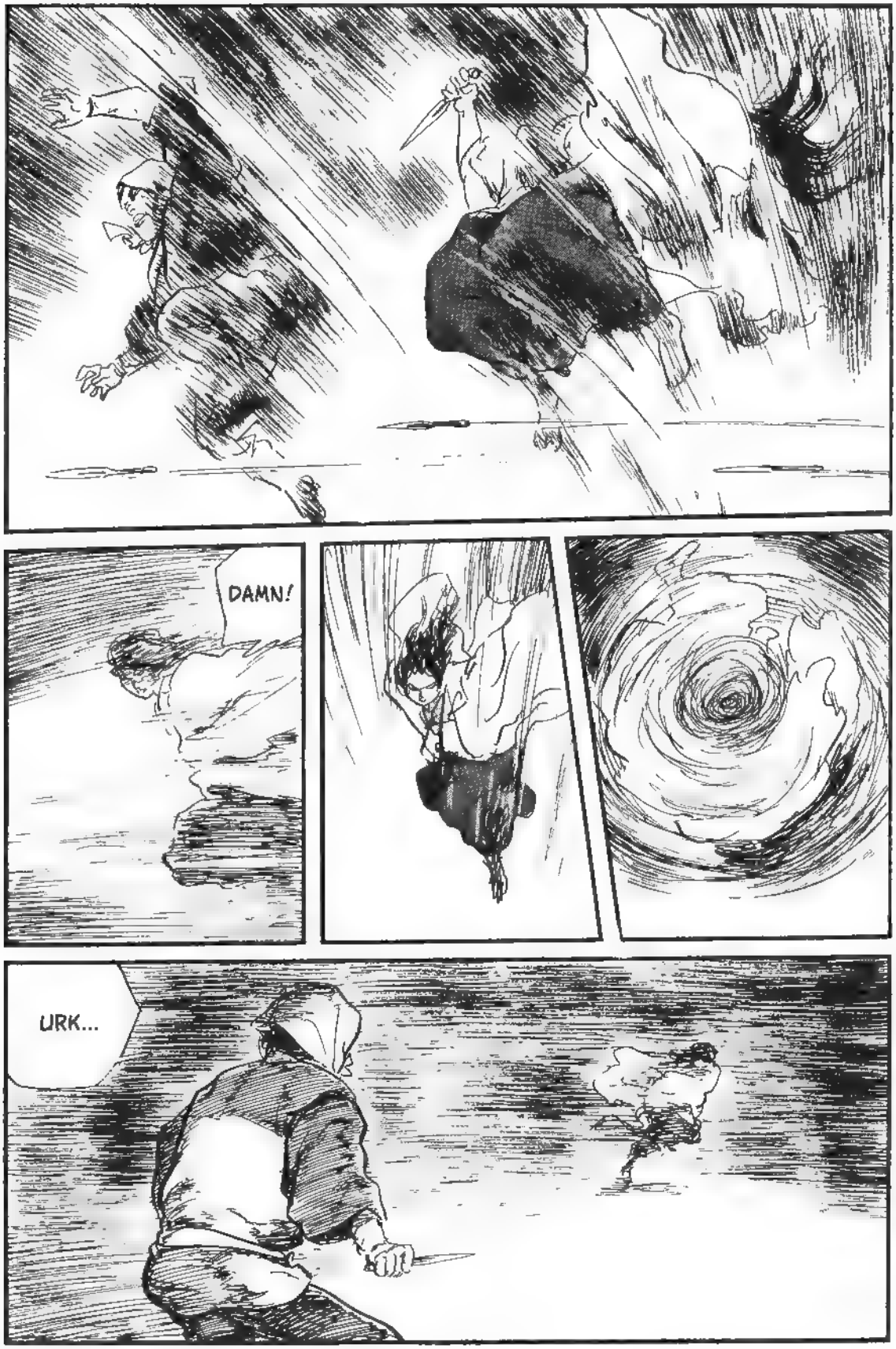
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
MMGH.

THEY VANISHED?

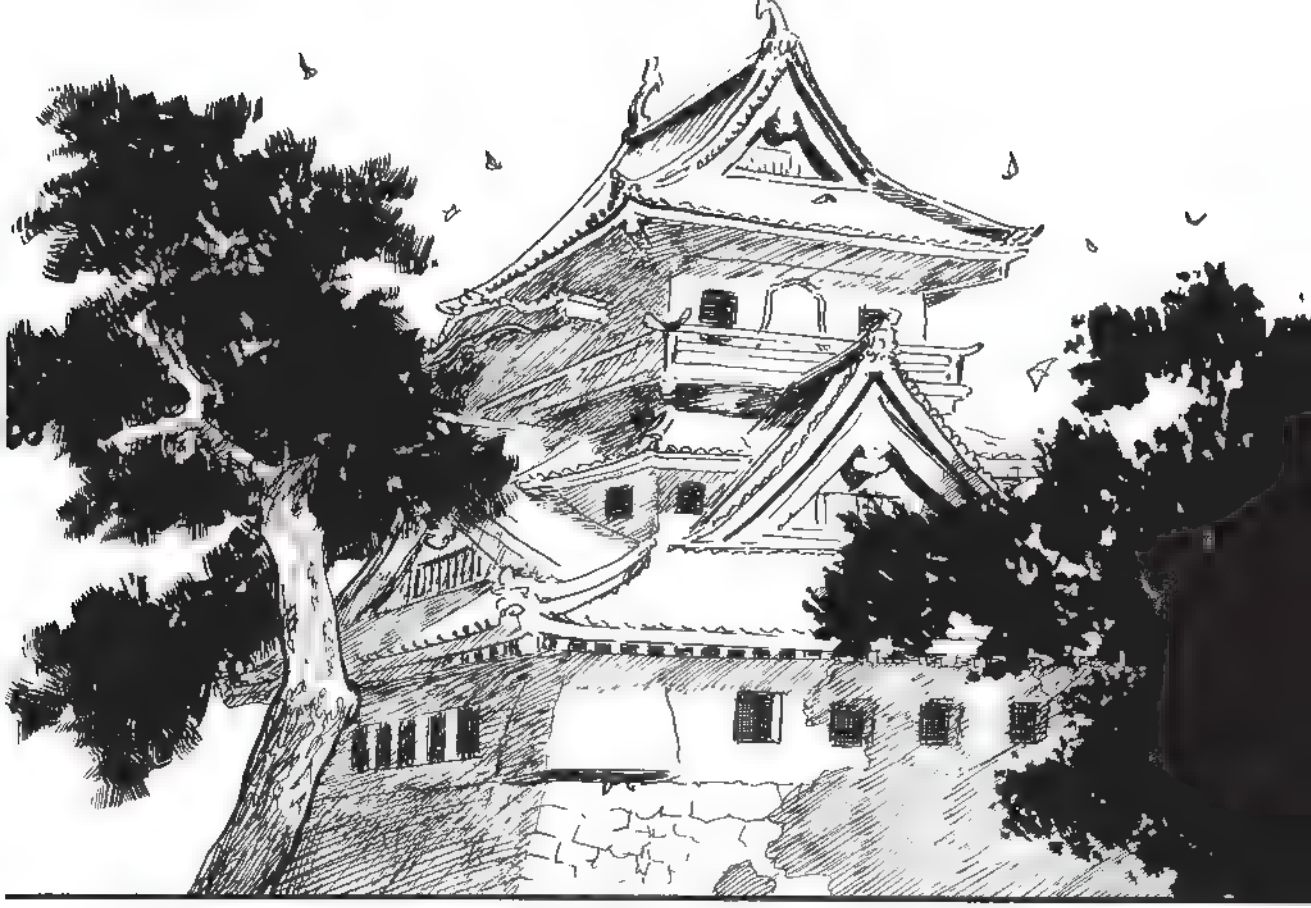
THEY MUST'VE REALIZED I SAW THROUGH THEIR TRICKS. THEY'RE PROBABLY PREPARING FOR THEIR NEXT ATTACK. I'D BETTER GET OUT OF HERE.


ヒュン
HYU
ヒュン
HYU

ムダムダムダ！
MUDA
MUDA
OUT!

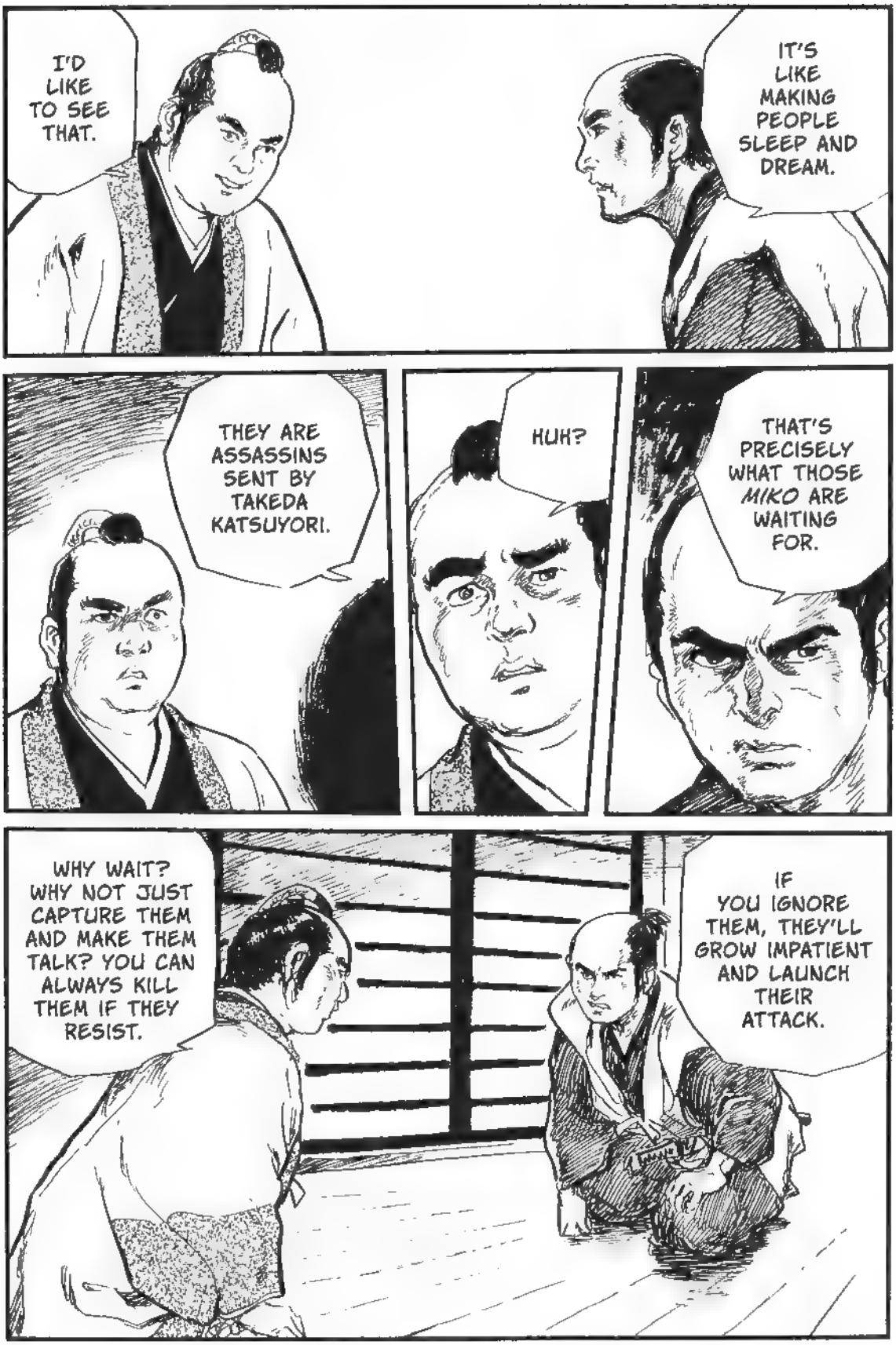

DAMN!
URK...

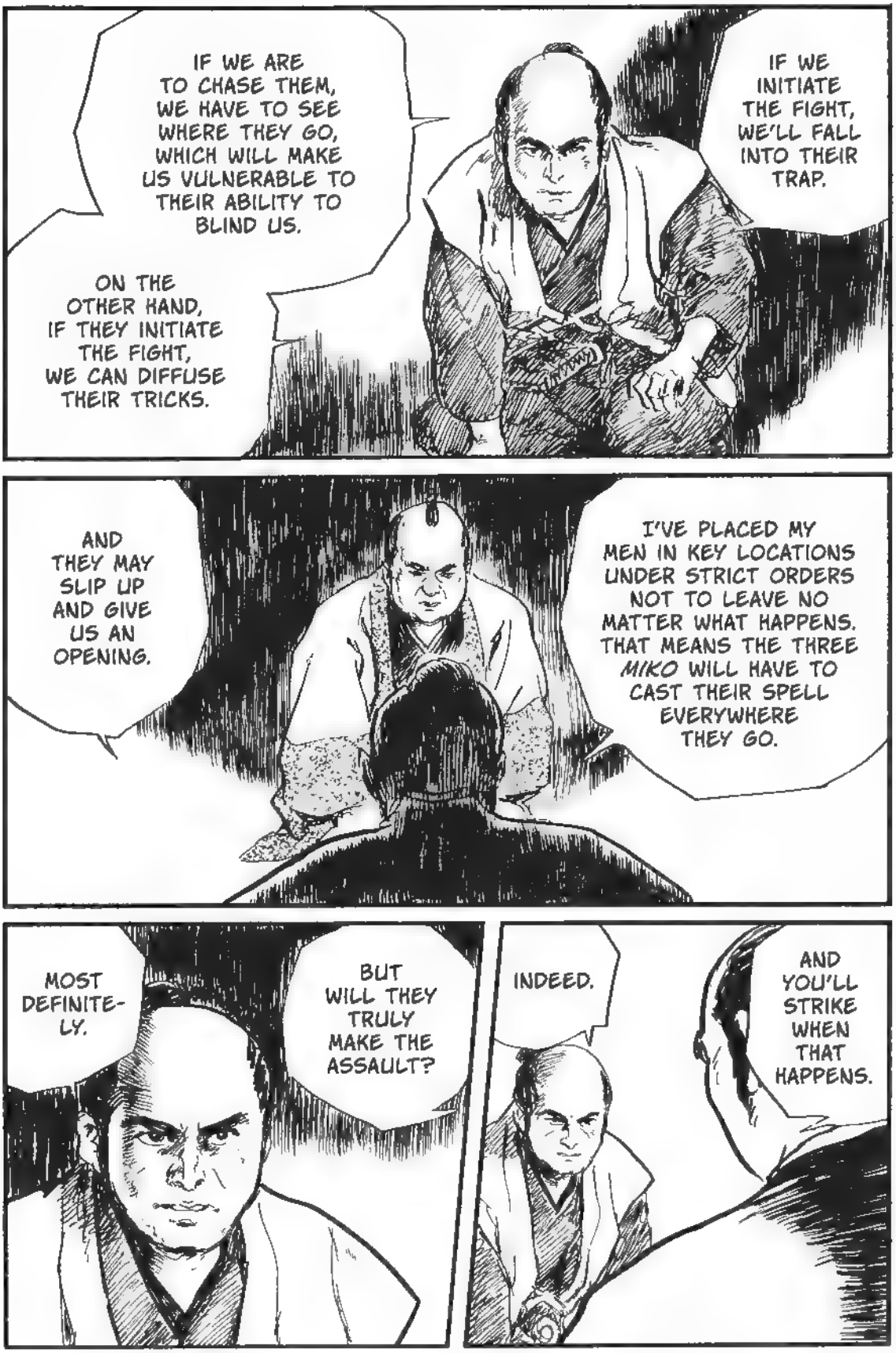
I...
IF YOU HADN'T COME...
MMMG...
BEFORE I SHUT MY EYES, I WAS ALREADY SPELL-BOUND.
THEY'RE SHOWING THEIR UNEARTHLY DANCE ALL OVER HAMAMATSU, HOPING THEIR REPUTATION WILL REACH MILORD'S EARS AND THAT EVENTUALLY HE'LL INVITE THEM INTO THE CASTLE. THEY'RE ALSO WAITING FOR US TO STIR.
WE BETTER STAY PUT. SO WE'LL WAIT.
WHAT A DEADLY TECHNIQUE. DEADLIER THAN KITE KATŌ'S...
THAT'S THE ONLY WAY.
WE'LL WAIT FOR THEM TO LOSE PATIENCE AND SNEAK INTO THE CASTLE.



THREE *MIKO* HAVE BECOME THE TALK OF THE TOWN.

THEY USE A TECHNIQUE THAT TRICKS PEOPLE'S MINDS, MAKING THEM SEE THINGS THAT ARE INVISIBLE.
I HEAR THEIR DANCING IS WONDROUSLY MYSTERIOUS.


I'D LIKE TO SEE THAT.
IT'S LIKE MAKING PEOPLE SLEEP AND DREAM.
THEY ARE ASSASSINS SENT BY TAKEDA KATSUYORI.
HUH?
THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT THOSE *MIKO* ARE WAITING FOR.
WHY WAIT? WHY NOT JUST CAPTURE THEM AND MAKE THEM TALK? YOU CAN ALWAYS KILL THEM IF THEY RESIST.
IF YOU IGNORE THEM, THEY'LL GROW IMPATIENT AND LAUNCH THEIR ATTACK.


IF WE ARE TO CHASE THEM, WE HAVE TO SEE WHERE THEY GO, WHICH WILL MAKE US VULNERABLE TO THEIR ABILITY TO BLIND US.
ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THEY INITIATE THE FIGHT, WE CAN DIFFUSE THEIR TRICKS.
IF WE INITIATE THE FIGHT, WE'LL FALL INTO THEIR TRAP.
AND THEY MAY SLIP UP AND GIVE US AN OPENING.
I'VE PLACED MY MEN IN KEY LOCATIONS UNDER STRICT ORDERS NOT TO LEAVE NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. THAT MEANS THE THREE *MIKO* WILL HAVE TO CAST THEIR SPELL EVERYWHERE THEY GO.
MOST DEFINITE-LY.
BUT WILL THEY TRULY MAKE THE ASSAULT?
INDEED.
AND YOU'LL STRIKE WHEN THAT HAPPENS.

DRINK IT.
DIS-GUSTING, HUH?
IT'S A MIXTURE OF COPPERHEAD, BLACK NEWT, YAMAIMO, LAMPREY, AND SIX HERBS.
IT'S A LOVE POTION OF IGA. HA HA HA HA HA HA.
WHAT IS THIS?

I WON'T MAKE LOVE TO YOU FOR A WHILE.
ENDURE IT.
...
...?!
WAIT UNTIL I TELL YOU.

WHEN I DO TELL YOU, NO MATTER WHEN AND WHERE, STRIP NAKED AND JUMP AT ME!

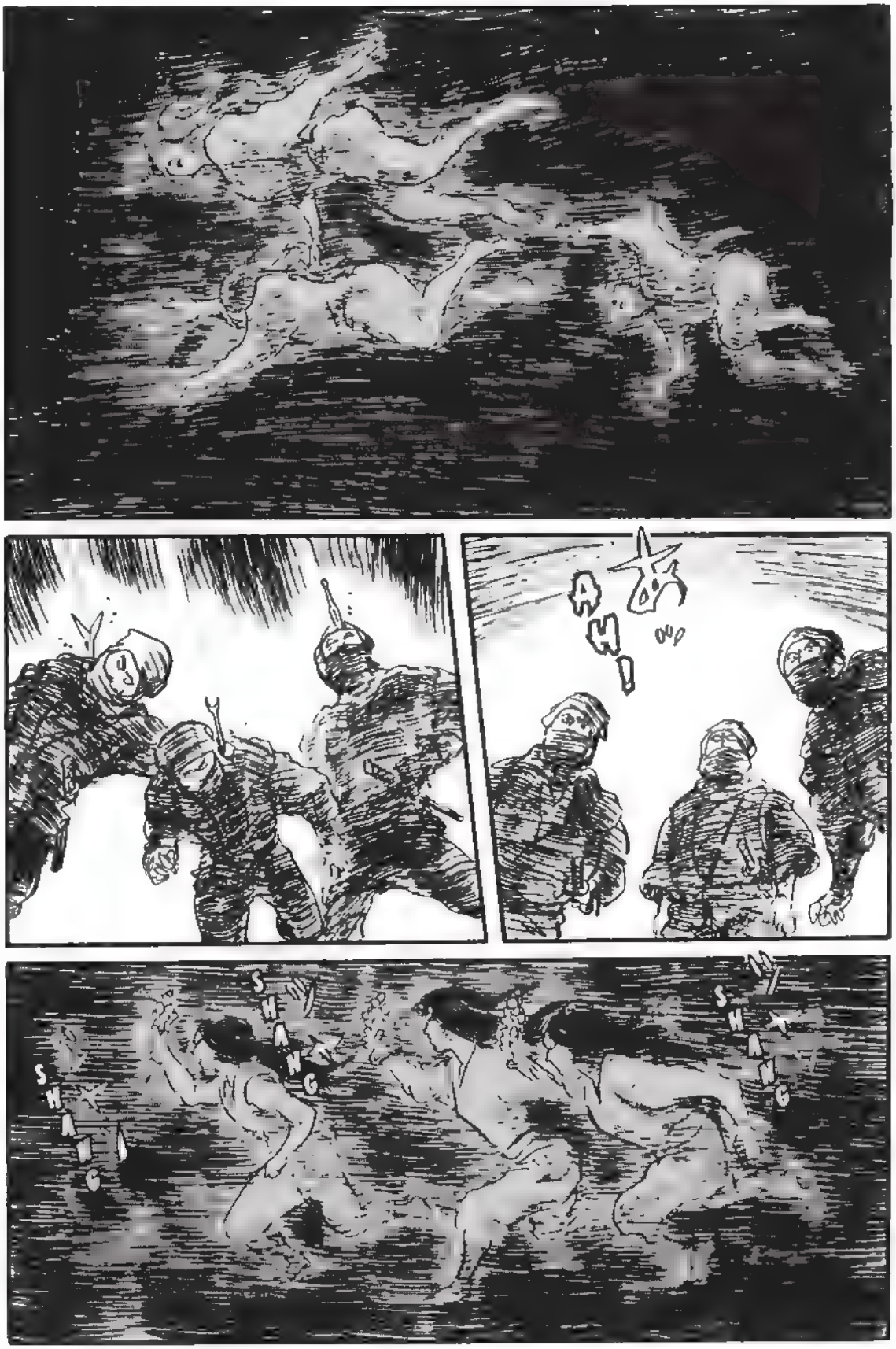
WHEN YOU DO, FOCUS ALL YOUR THOUGHTS ON MAKING LOVE AND FORGET EVERYTHING ELSE

SURRGH
AH

URK...
ALL OUR EFFORT WILL BE WASTED!
MY SHOULDERS ARE GROWING STIFF.
THEY WILL COME, I ASSURE YOU.
IT'S BEEN OVER SEVEN DAYS, AND NOT EVEN A PEEP.

はははは
はははは
はははは
はははは

SMAK
HAA HAA
IZUNA SORCERESSES NEED TO BE VISIBLE WHEN THEY CAST THEIR SPELLS, AND THAT MEANS THEY'LL ATTACK ONLY ON A BRIGHT NIGHT.
IT'S FULL MOON TONIGHT. THEY MIGHT SHOW UP!


AH!
SHANG
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SHANG

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SHING
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SHAANG
SHAANG
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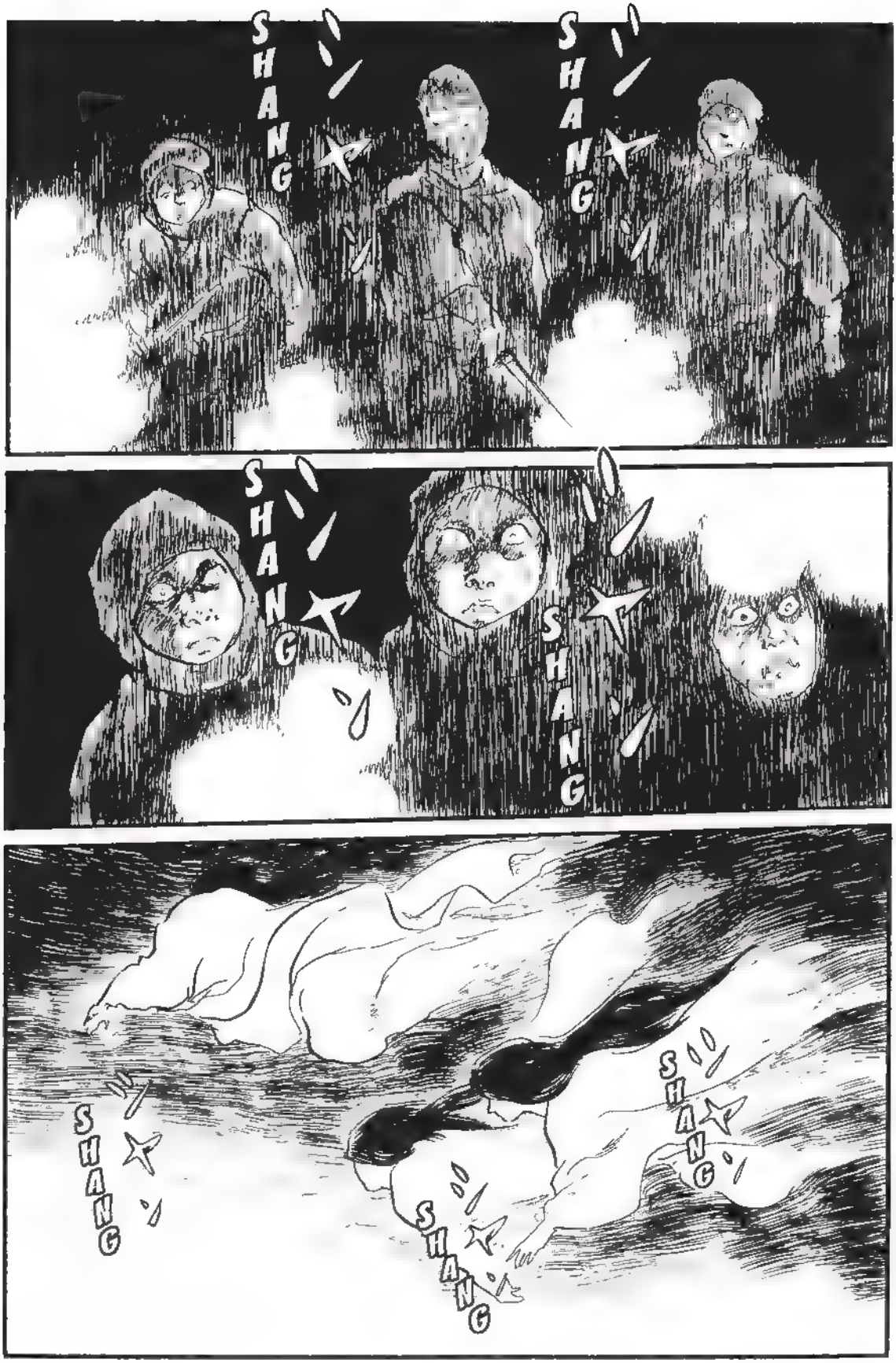
SHAANG
SHAANG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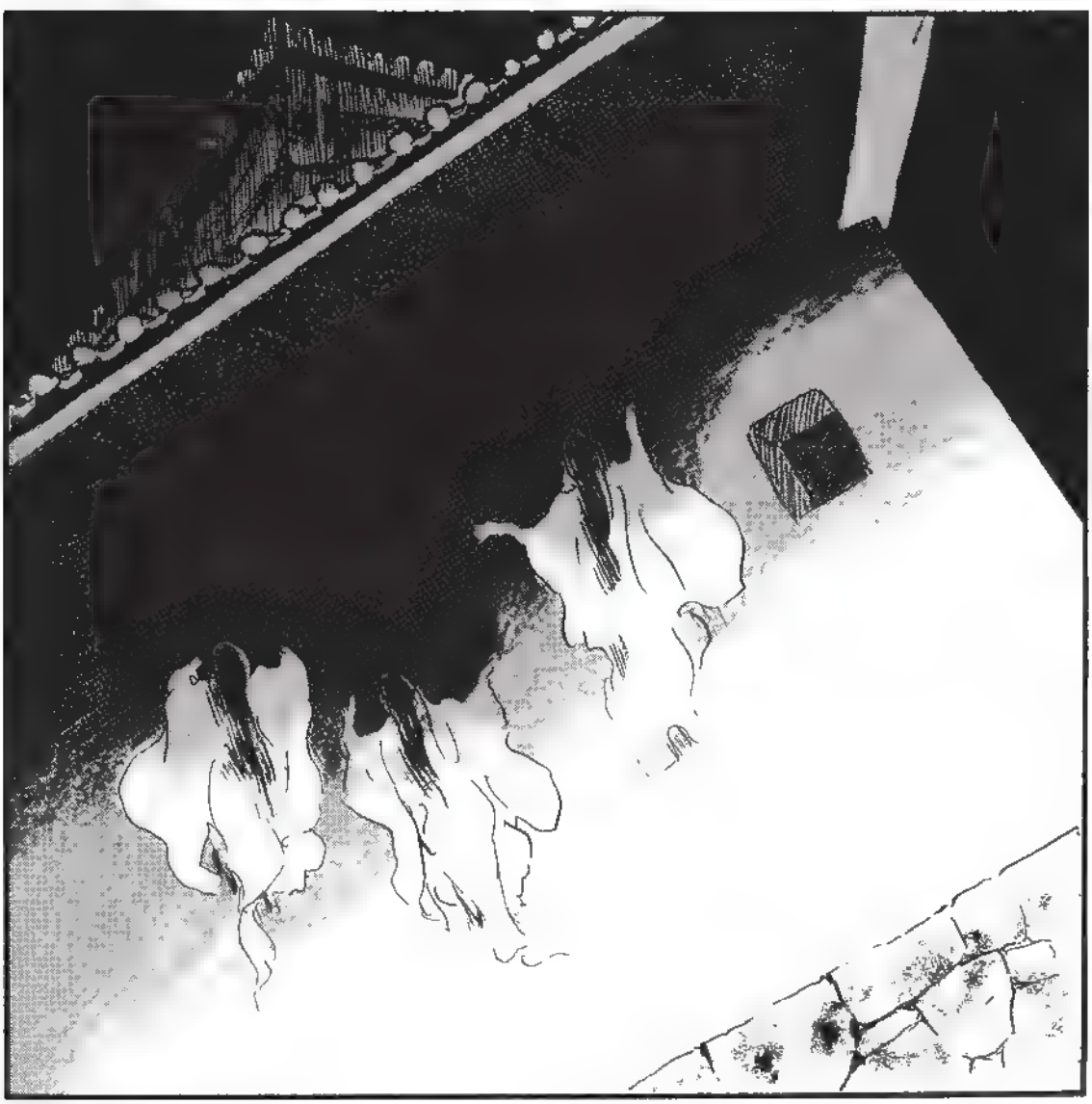
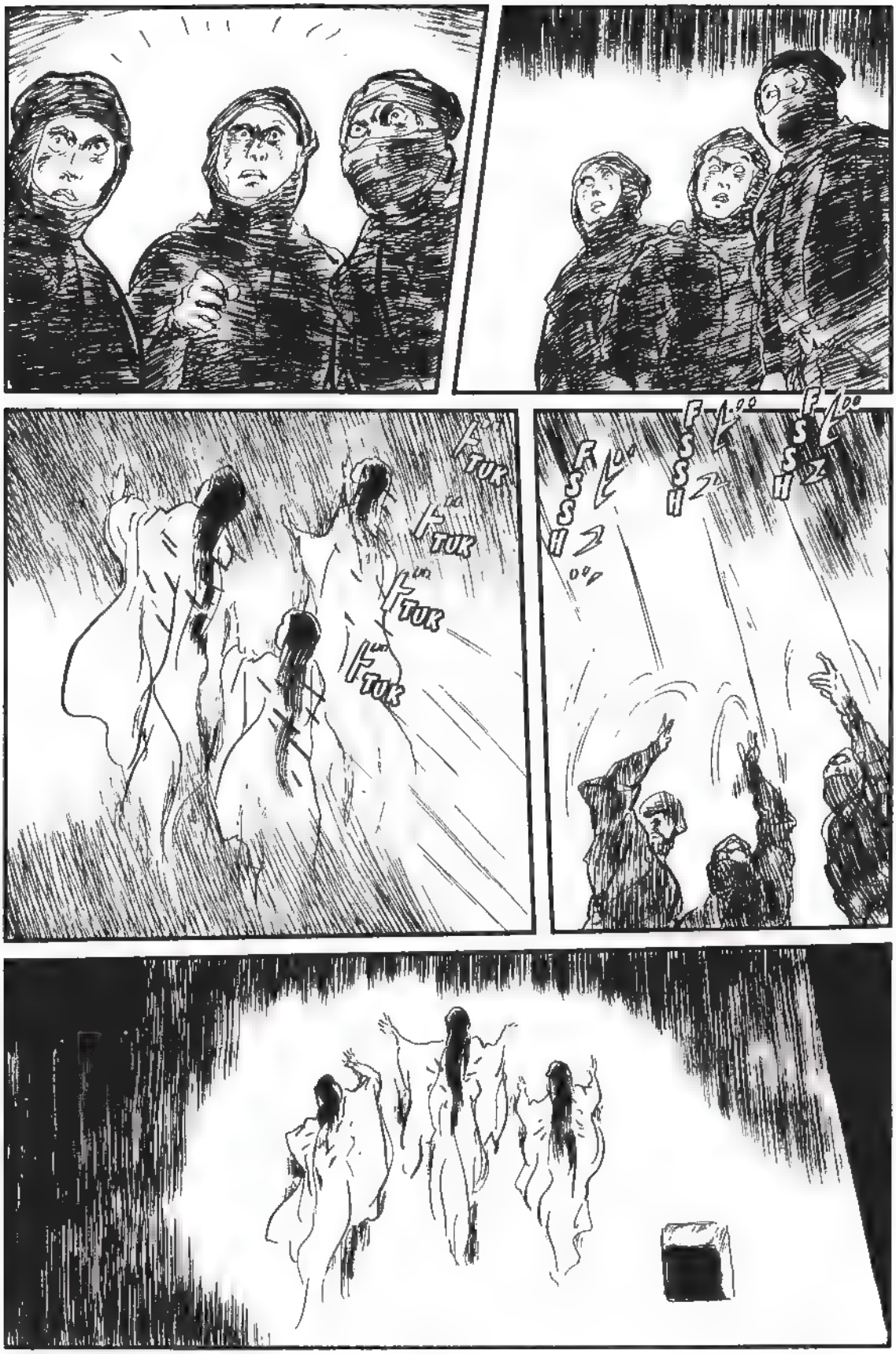


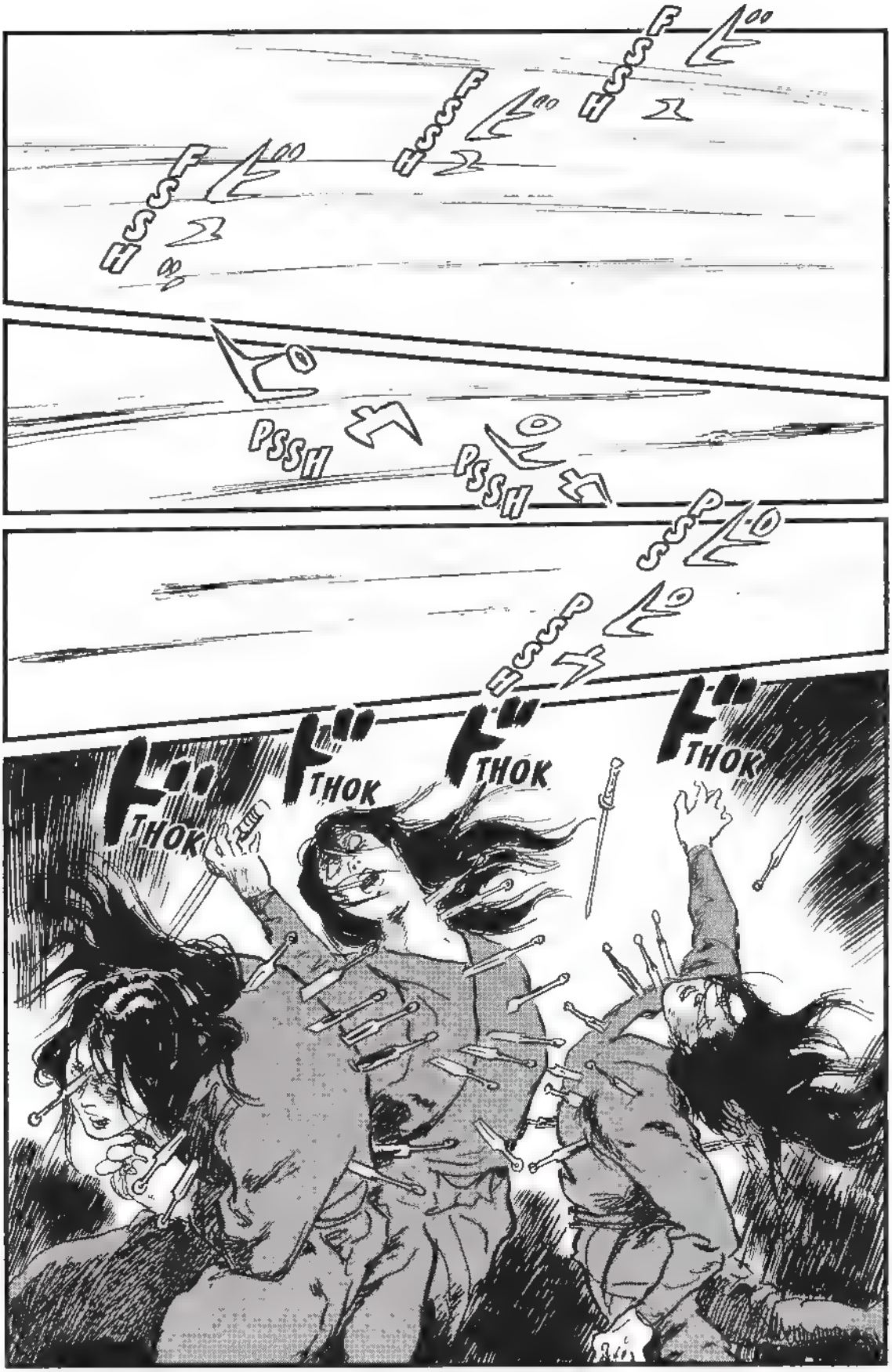

TUK
TUK
TUK
TUK
SSH
SSH
SSH

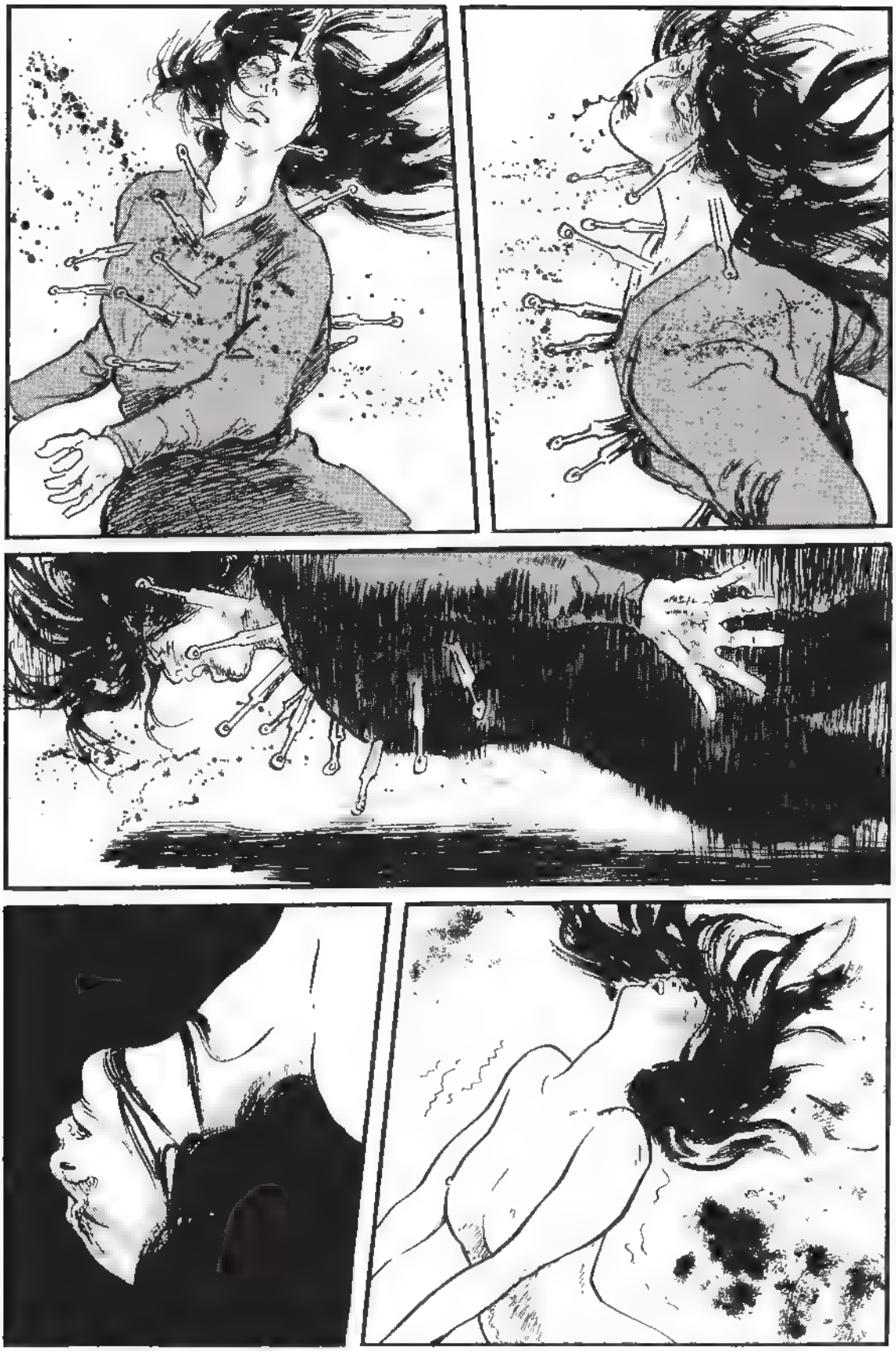
SHUKK
GLORTCH

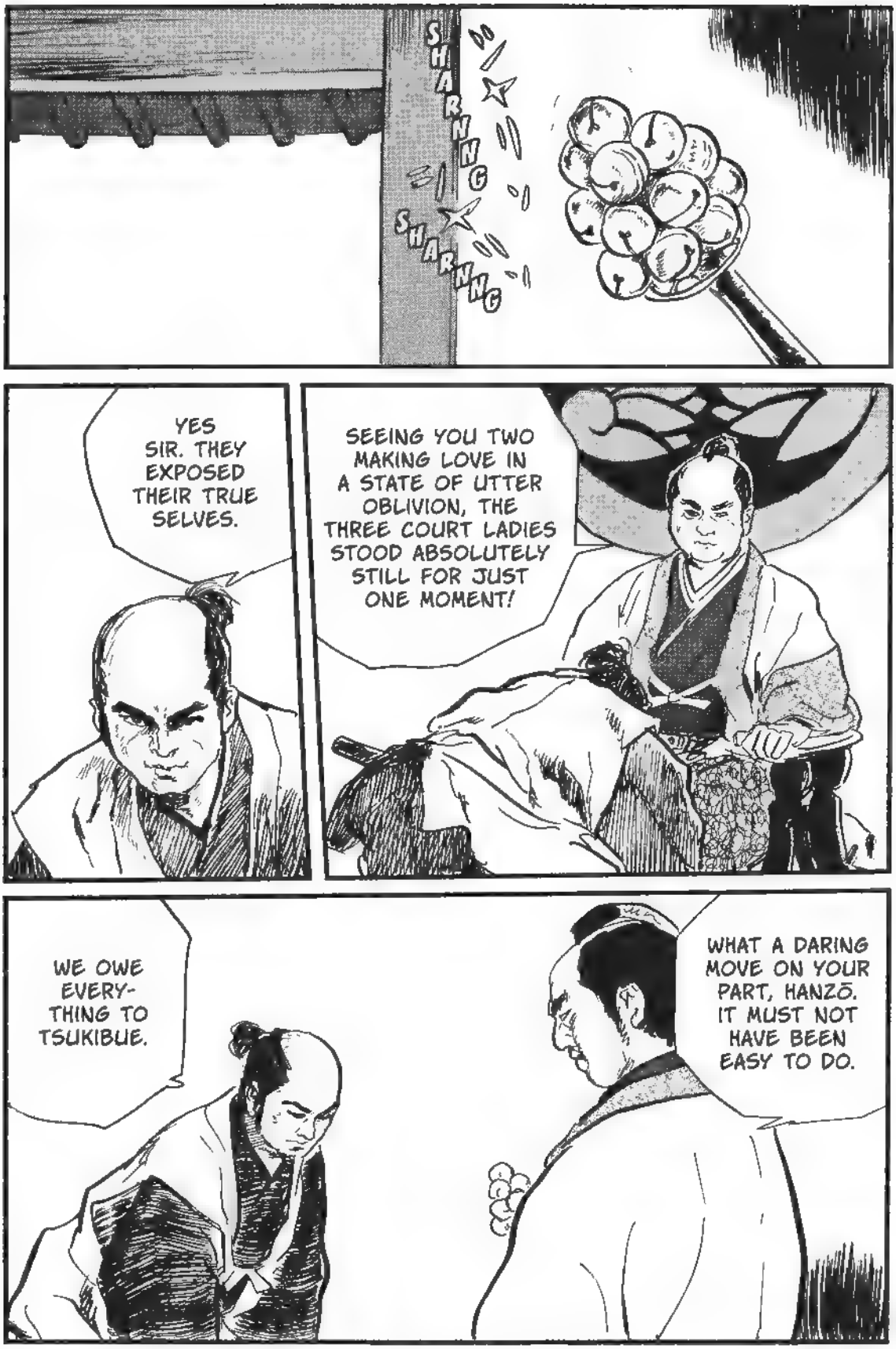
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG
SHANG

NOW, TSUKIBUE!

あ
AHHHH
あ
AAHHH

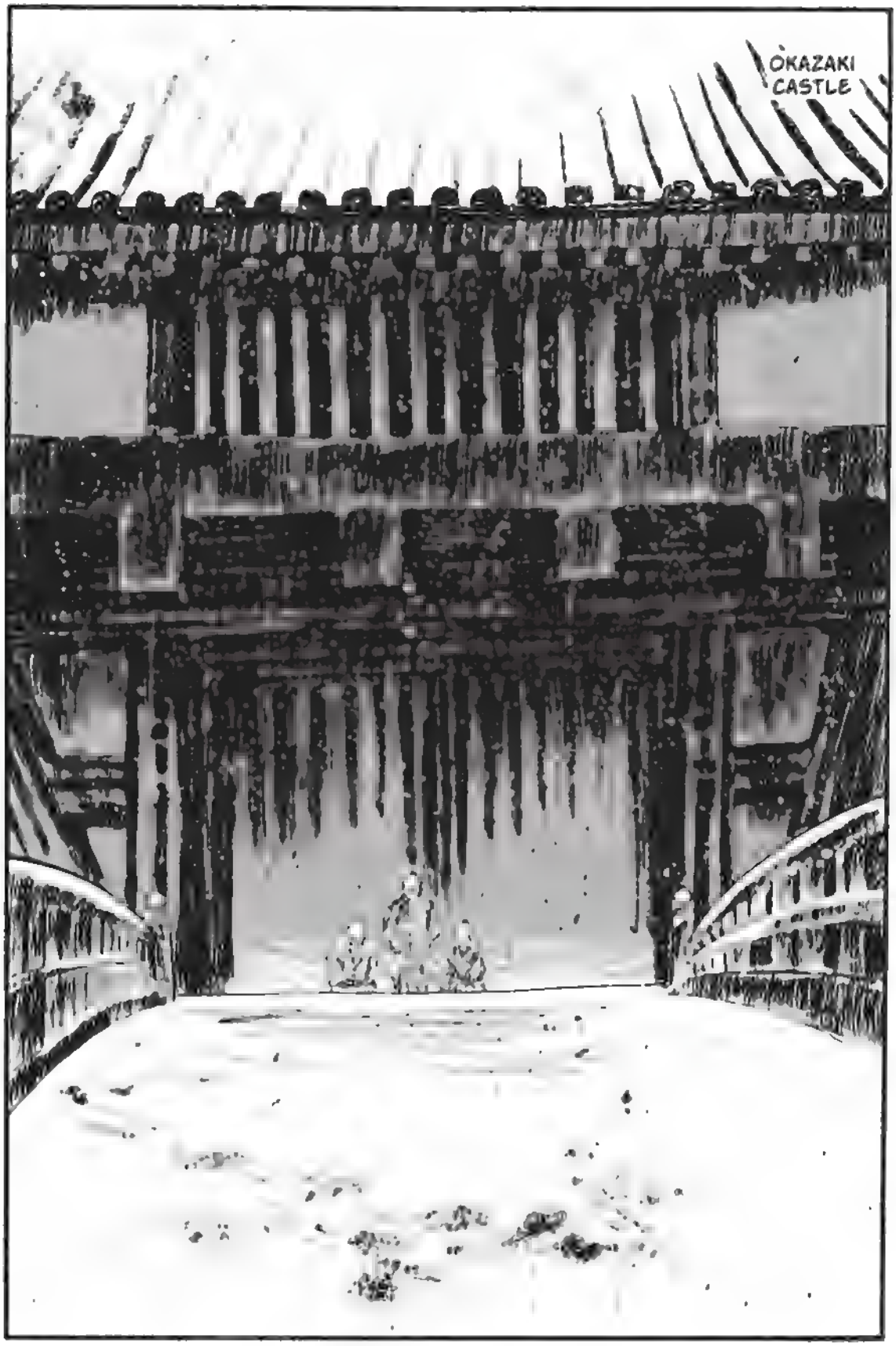

PSSSH
PSSSH
THOK
THOK
THOK
THOK

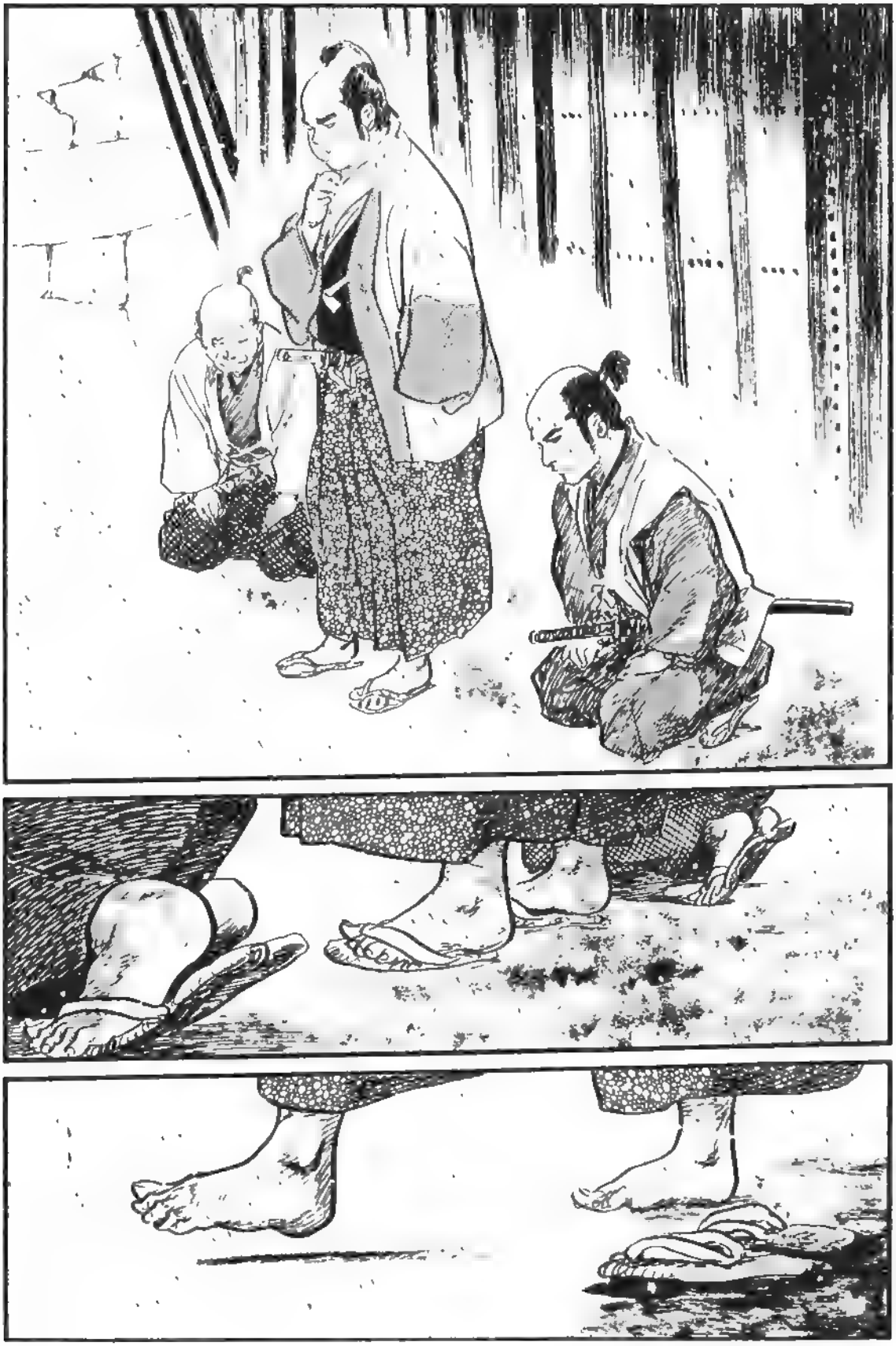


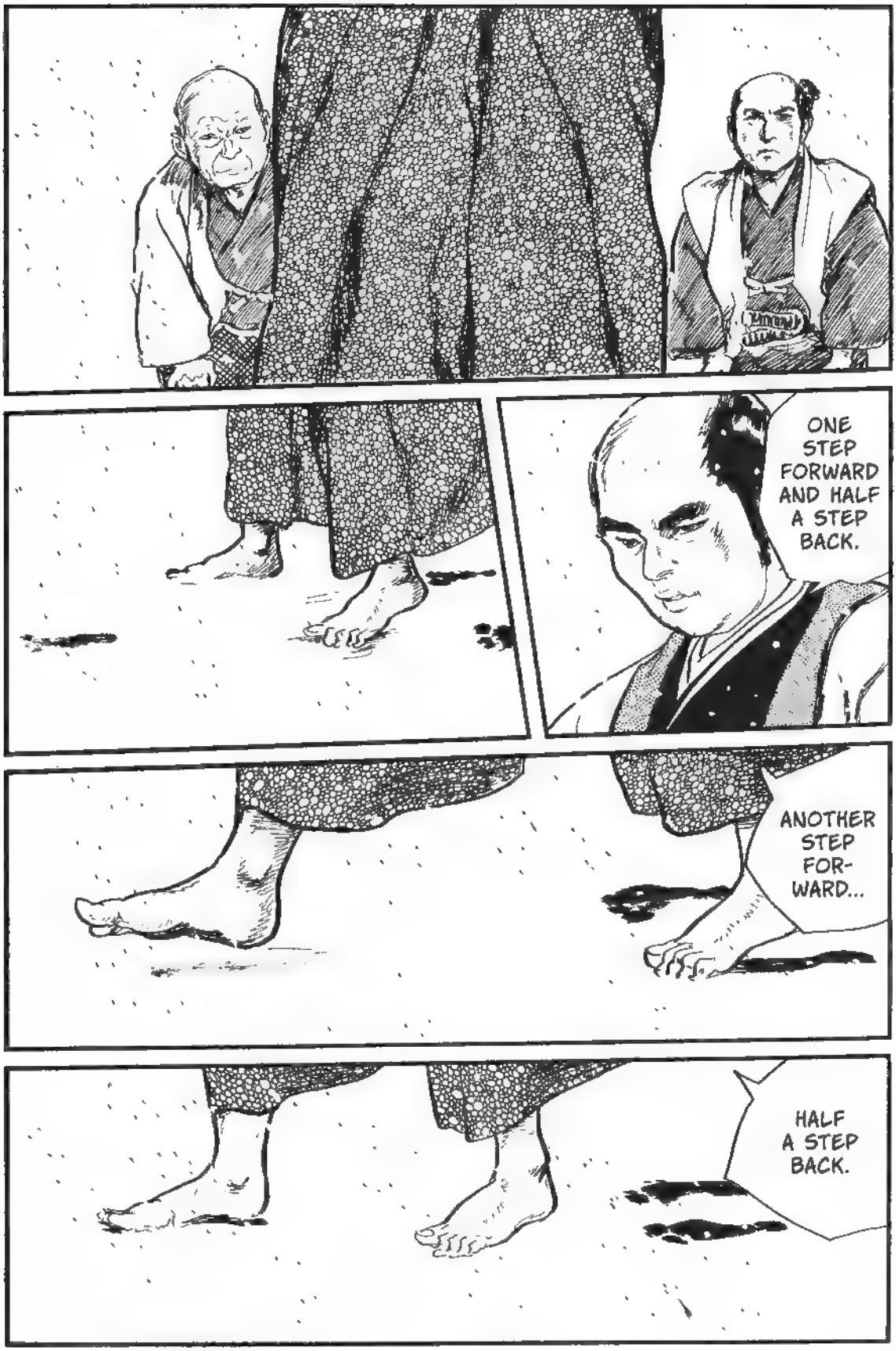

SHARNNG
SHARNNG
YES SIR. THEY EXPOSED THEIR TRUE SELVES.
SEEING YOU TWO MAKING LOVE IN A STATE OF UTTER OBLIVION, THE THREE COURT LADIES STOOD ABSOLUTELY STILL FOR JUST ONE MOMENT!
WE OWE EVERY-THING TO TSUKIBUE.
WHAT A DARING MOVE ON YOUR PART, HANZŌ. IT MUST NOT HAVE BEEN EASY TO DO.

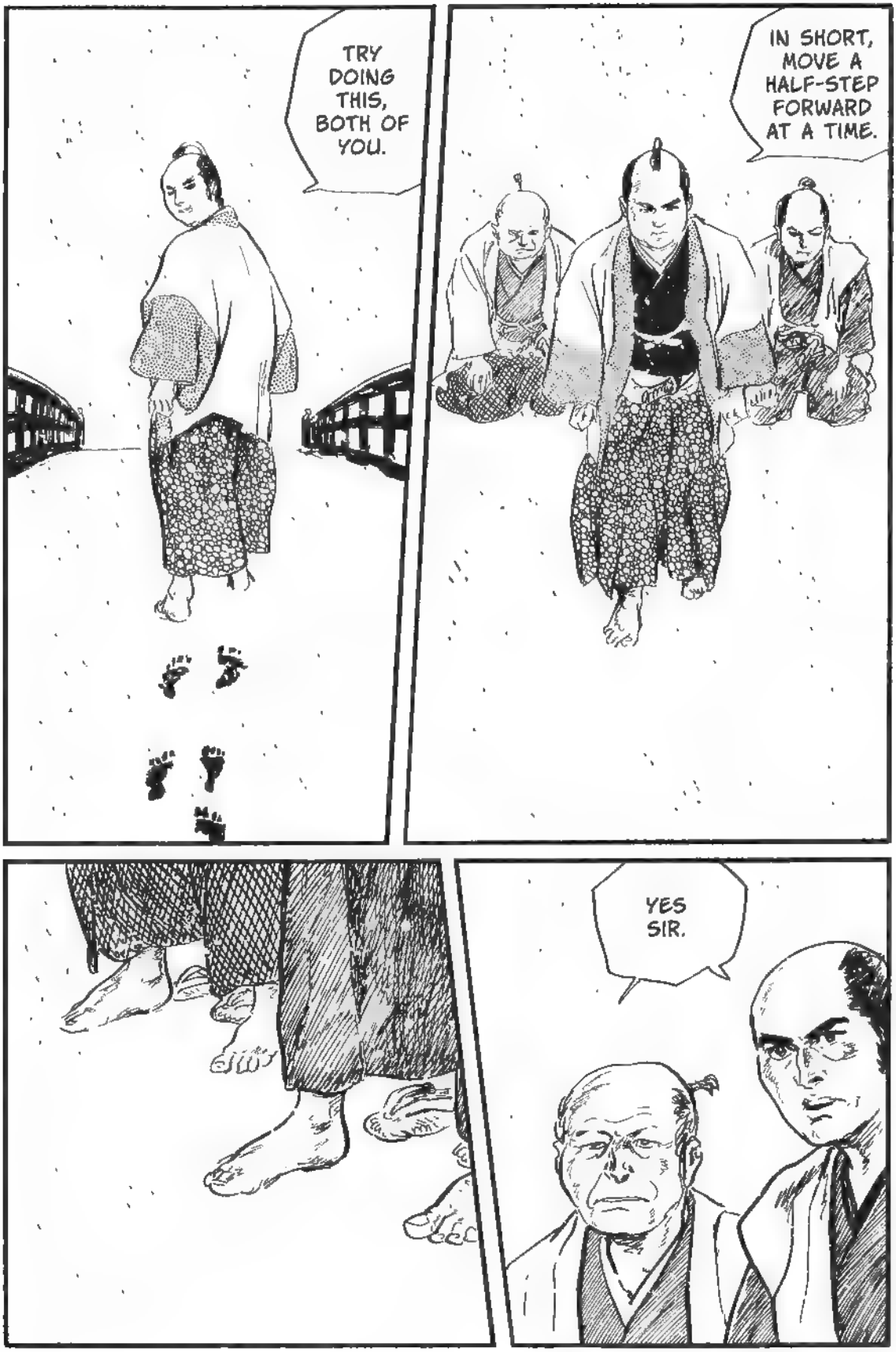
I HAVE THIS MANY MYSELF.
YOUR WIFE, IKKŌ, AND TSUKI-BUE.
SO YOU HAVE THIS MANY?
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
INDEED.
...IS LONG AND FAR.
I'D BETTER KEEP GOING RELENT-LESSLY. THE PATH...
YOU SAVED MY NECK YET AGAIN.

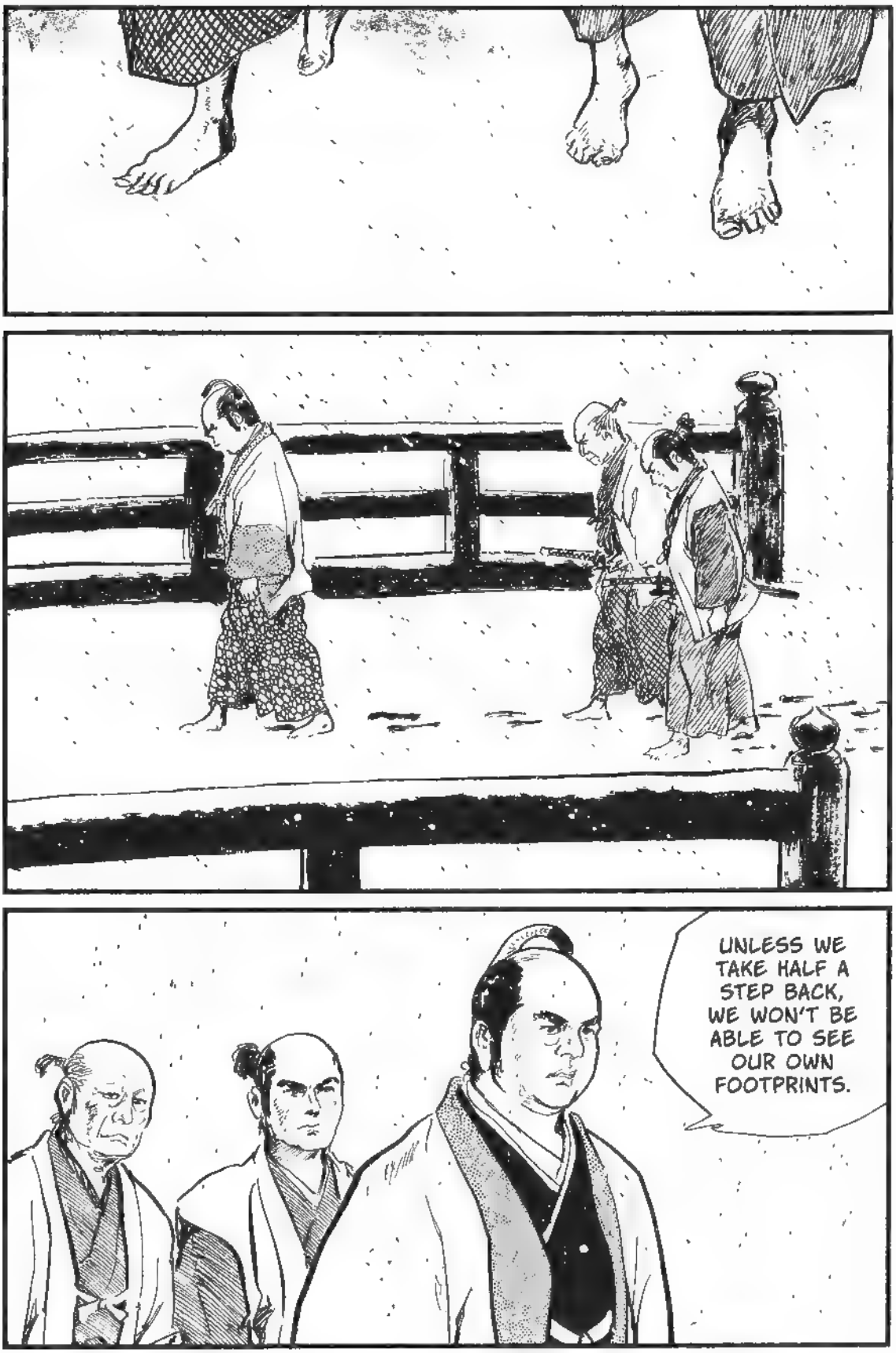
Chapter on Half a Step Forward
No. 1: Bad Blood Part 1


OKAZAKI
CASTLE



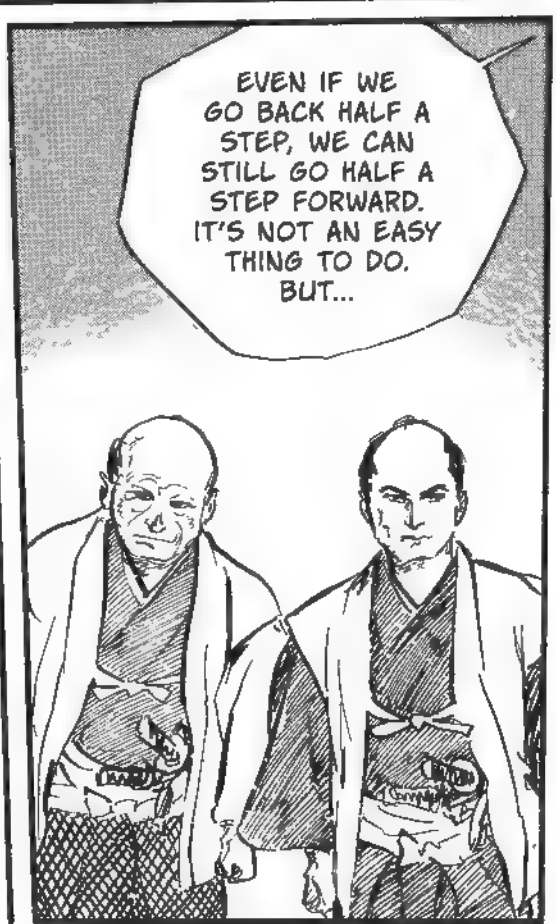

ONE STEP FORWARD AND HALF A STEP BACK.
ANOTHER STEP FOR-WARD...
HALF A STEP BACK.

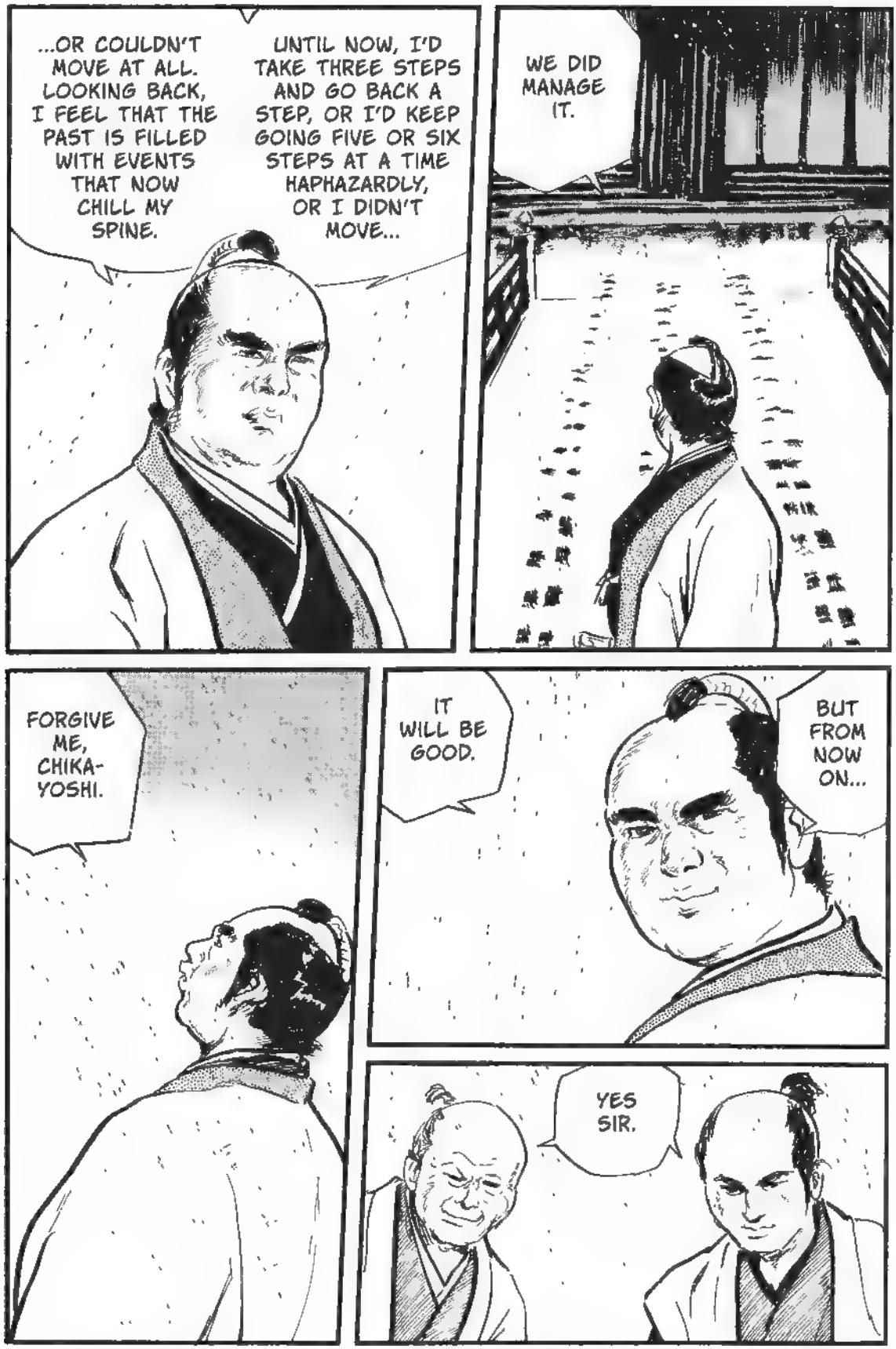

TRY DOING THIS, BOTH OF YOU.
IN SHORT, MOVE A HALF-STEP FORWARD AT A TIME.
YES SIR.

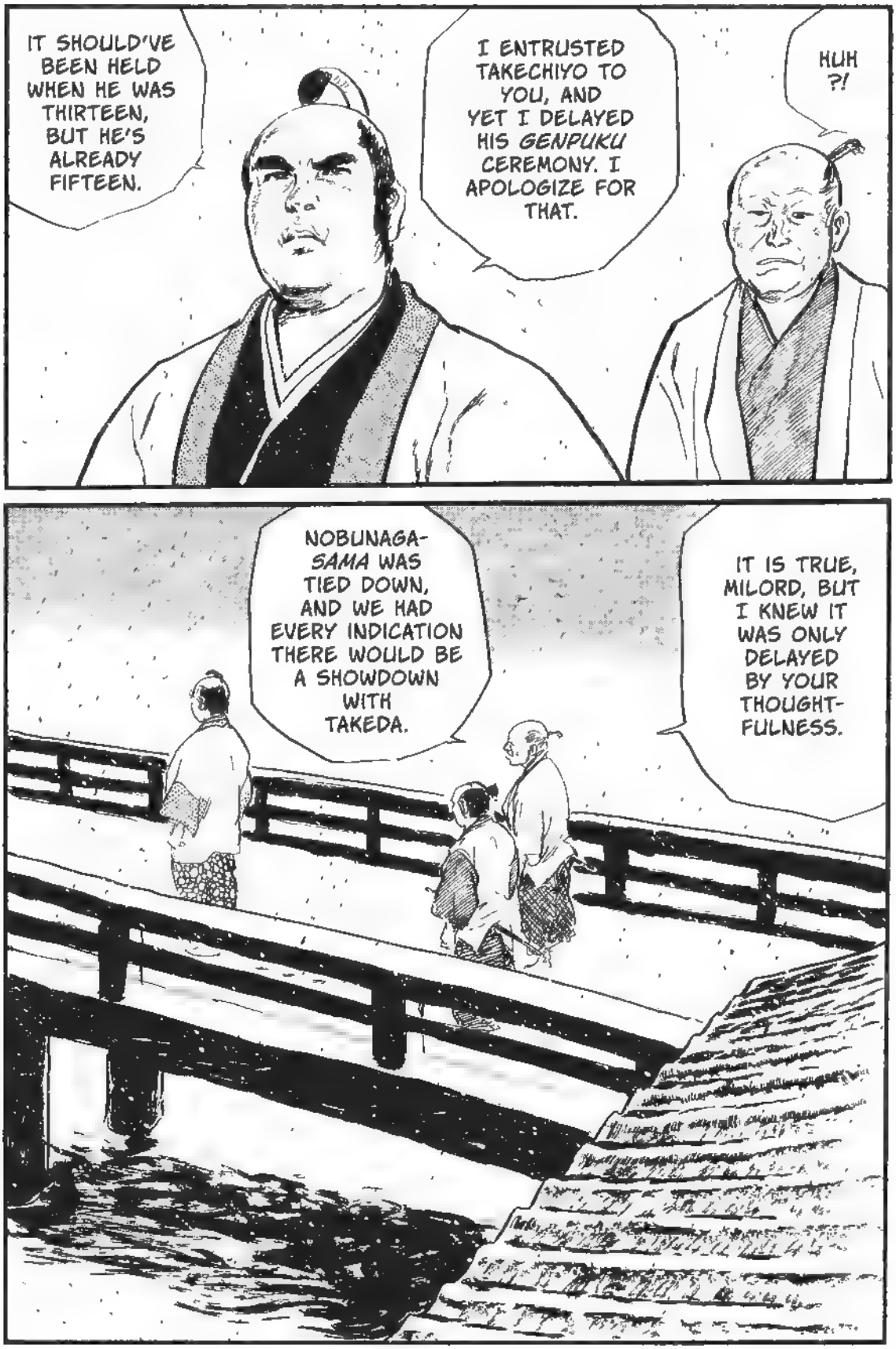

UNLESS WE TAKE HALF A STEP BACK, WE WON'T BE ABLE TO SEE OUR OWN FOOTPRINTS.

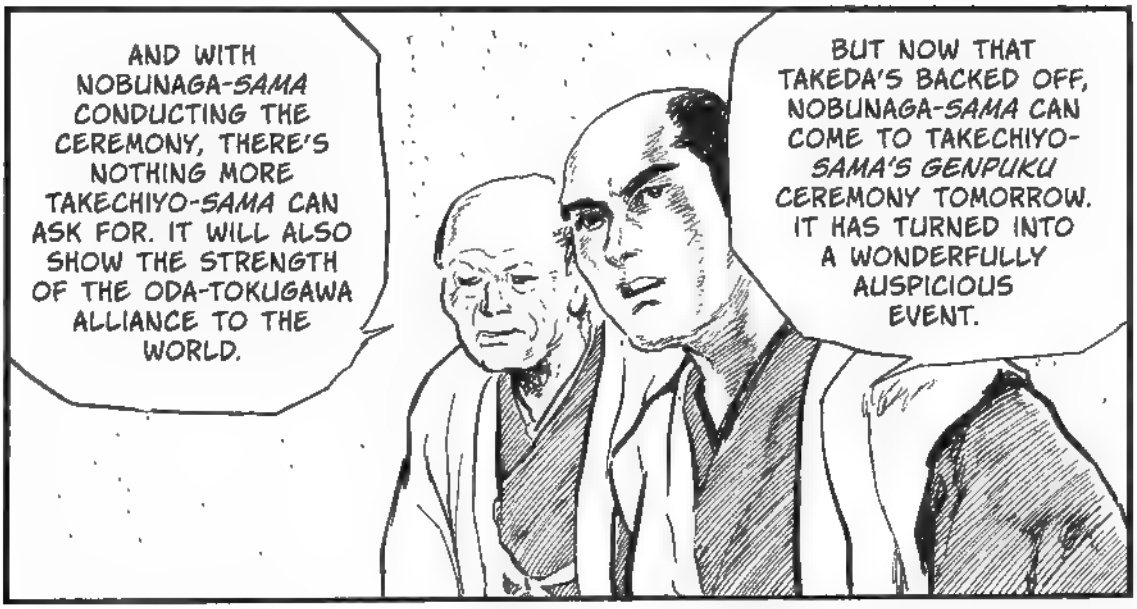
IN OTHER WORDS, IT DEMANDS THAT WE MOVE FORWARD WITH THE INTENT TO REFLECT UPON OURSELVES.
TO LOOK BACK MEANS TO REGRET. BUT TO GO BACK A HALF STEP MEANS WE CAN CONTEMPLATE UPON THE FULL STEP WE'VE TAKEN.

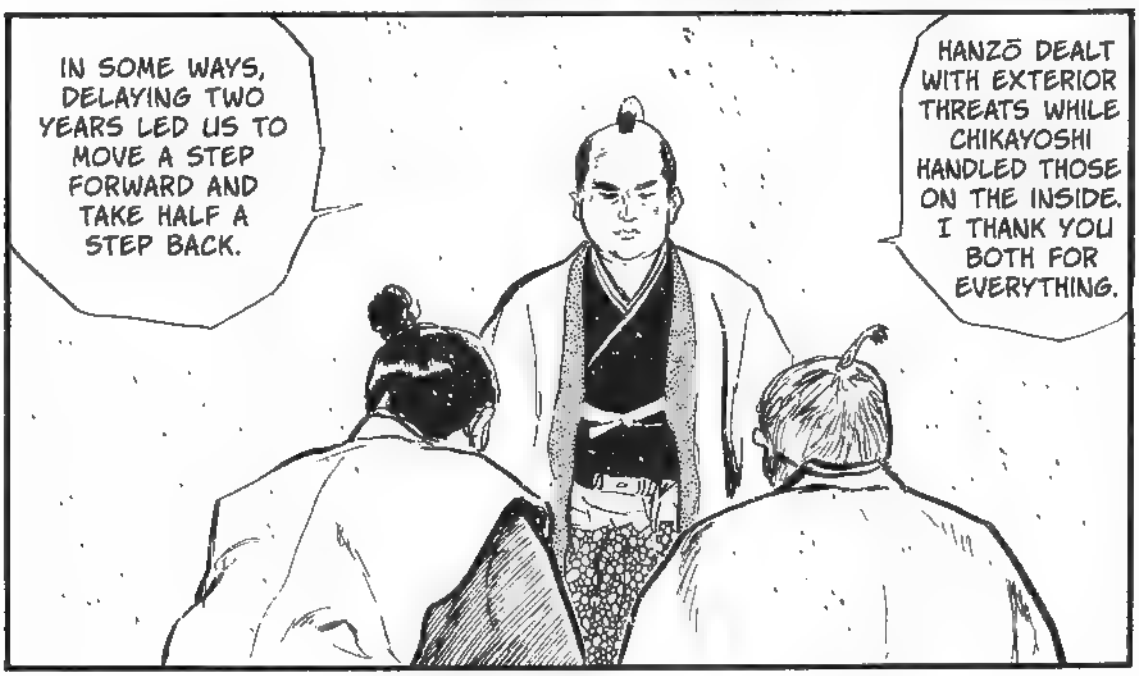
WE STILL MADE IT THIS FAR.


EVEN IF WE GO BACK HALF A STEP, WE CAN STILL GO HALF A STEP FORWARD. IT'S NOT AN EASY THING TO DO. BUT...

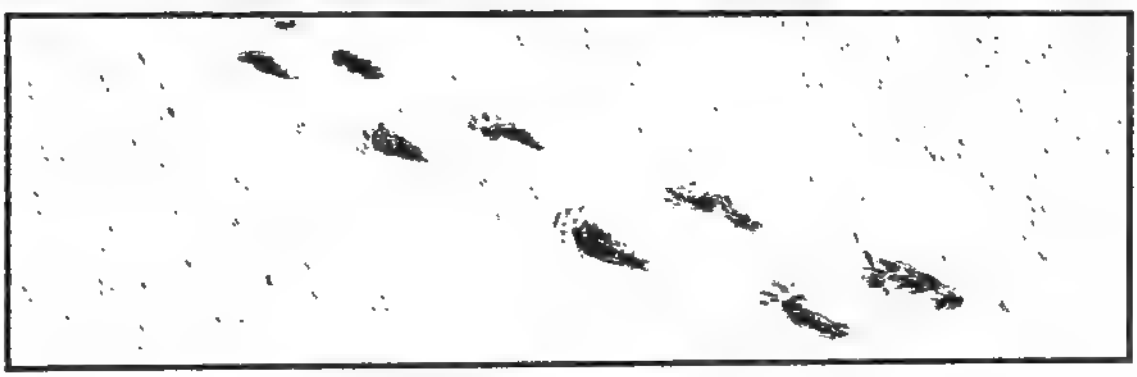

...OR COULDN'T MOVE AT ALL. LOOKING BACK, I FEEL THAT THE PAST IS FILLED WITH EVENTS THAT NOW CHILL MY SPINE.
UNTIL NOW, I'D TAKE THREE STEPS AND GO BACK A STEP, OR I'D KEEP GOING FIVE OR SIX STEPS AT A TIME HAPHAZARDLY, OR I DIDN'T MOVE...
WE DID MANAGE IT.
FORGIVE ME, CHIKA-YOSHI.
IT WILL BE GOOD.
BUT FROM NOW ON...
YES SIR.


IT SHOULD'VE BEEN HELD WHEN HE WAS THIRTEEN, BUT HE'S ALREADY FIFTEEN.
I ENTRUSTED TAKECHIYO TO YOU, AND YET I DELAYED HIS *GENPUKU* CEREMONY. I APOLOGIZE FOR THAT.
HUH ?!
NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* WAS TIED DOWN, AND WE HAD EVERY INDICATION THERE WOULD BE A SHOWDOWN WITH TAKEDA.
IT IS TRUE, MILORD, BUT I KNEW IT WAS ONLY DELAYED BY YOUR THOUGHT-FULNESS.

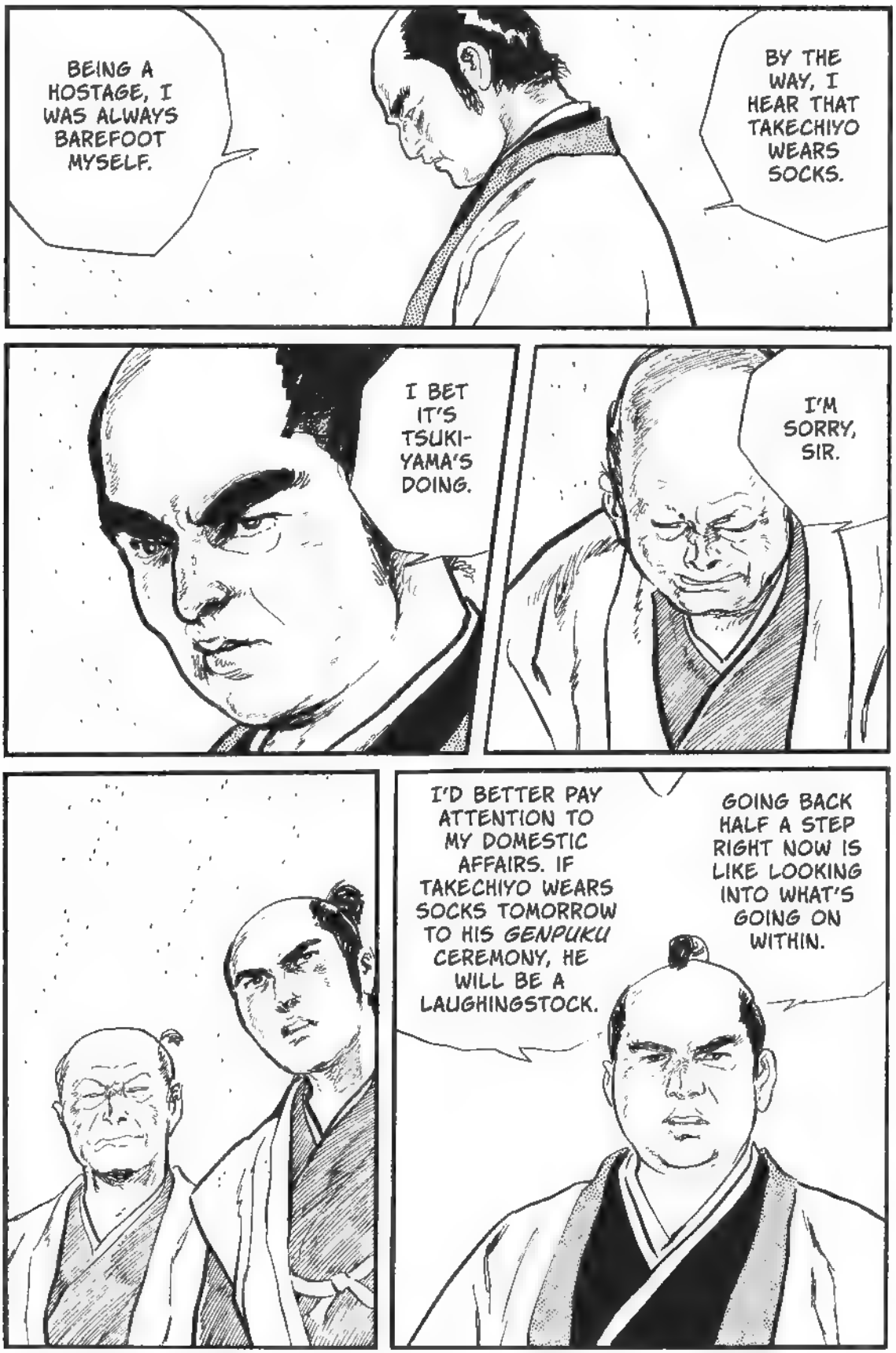

AND WITH NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* CONDUCTING THE CEREMONY, THERE'S NOTHING MORE TAKECHIYO-*SAMA* CAN ASK FOR. IT WILL ALSO SHOW THE STRENGTH OF THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE TO THE WORLD.
BUT NOW THAT TAKEDA'S BACKED OFF, NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* CAN COME TO TAKECHIYO-*SAMA'S GENPUKU* CEREMONY TOMORROW. IT HAS TURNED INTO A WONDERFULLY AUSPICIOUS EVENT.


IN SOME WAYS, DELAYING TWO YEARS LED US TO MOVE A STEP FORWARD AND TAKE HALF A STEP BACK.
HANZŌ DEALT WITH EXTERIOR THREATS WHILE CHIKAYOSHI HANDLED THOSE ON THE INSIDE. I THANK YOU BOTH FOR EVERYTHING.

THIS IS ALL VERY GOOD.
TAKECHIYO HAS GROWN UP TO BE A FINE YOUNG MAN. AND WITH HANZŌ GETTING THE BEST OF TAKEDA, NOBUNAGA-*DONO* CAN MOVE, AGAIN.

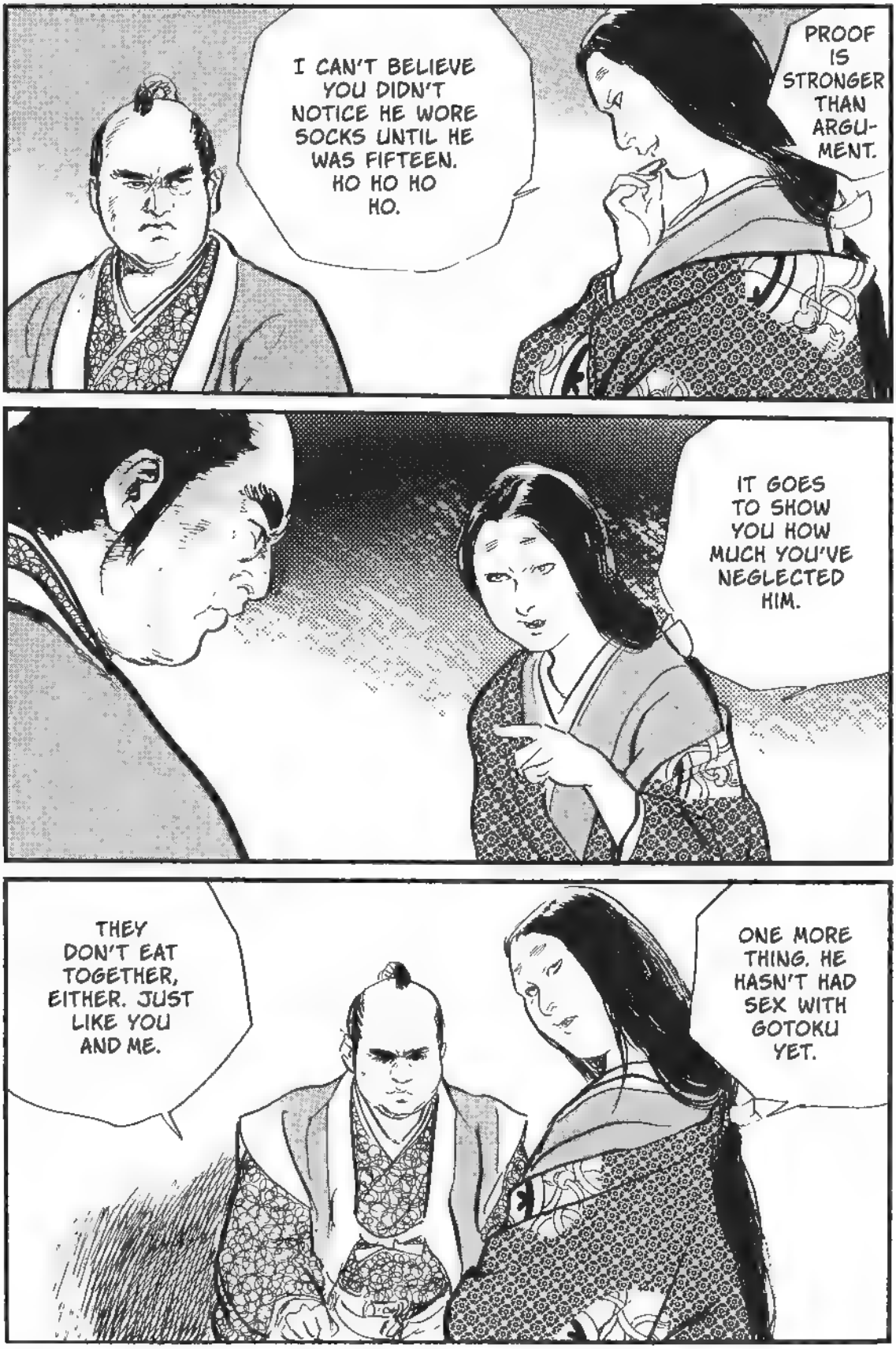


IT'S COLD.


BEING A HOSTAGE, I WAS ALWAYS BAREFOOT MYSELF.
BY THE WAY, I HEAR THAT TAKECHIYO WEARS SOCKS.
I BET IT'S TSUKI-YAMA'S DOING.
I'M SORRY, SIR.
I'D BETTER PAY ATTENTION TO MY DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. IF TAKECHIYO WEARS SOCKS TOMORROW TO HIS *GENPUKU* CEREMONY, HE WILL BE A LAUGHINGSTOCK.
GOING BACK HALF A STEP RIGHT NOW IS LIKE LOOKING INTO WHAT'S GOING ON WITHIN.

ANCIENT WISDOM TELLS US TO KEEP THE HEAD COOL AND THE FEET WARM.
BUT STILL WE DON'T GET SICK.
NEITHER NOBUNAGA-*DONO* OR I WEAR SOCKS.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?
KEEPING THE FEET WARM HELPS TO AVOID ALL KINDS OF ILLNESSES.

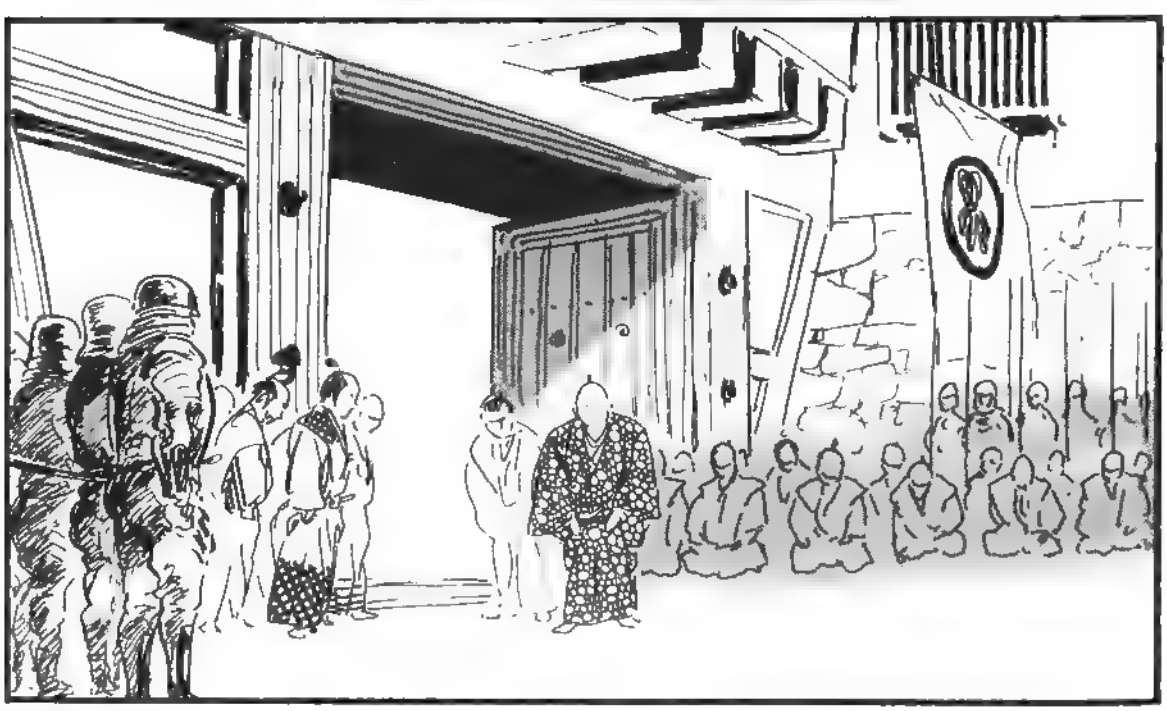
BESIDES, SOCKS MAKE YOU SLIP EASILY.
A LORD MUST SET AN EXAMPLE TO HIS VASSALS.
IT'S TOO LATE.
HO HO HO HO HO.
WHAT IF HE FALLS? THE VASSALS WILL LAUGH AT HIM.
MAKE HIM GO BAREFOOT AND YOU'LL SEE.
EVER SINCE TAKECHIYO WAS A LITTLE BOY, HE'S WORN SOCKS. IF HE STOPS WEARING THEM NOW, HE'LL CATCH COLD.

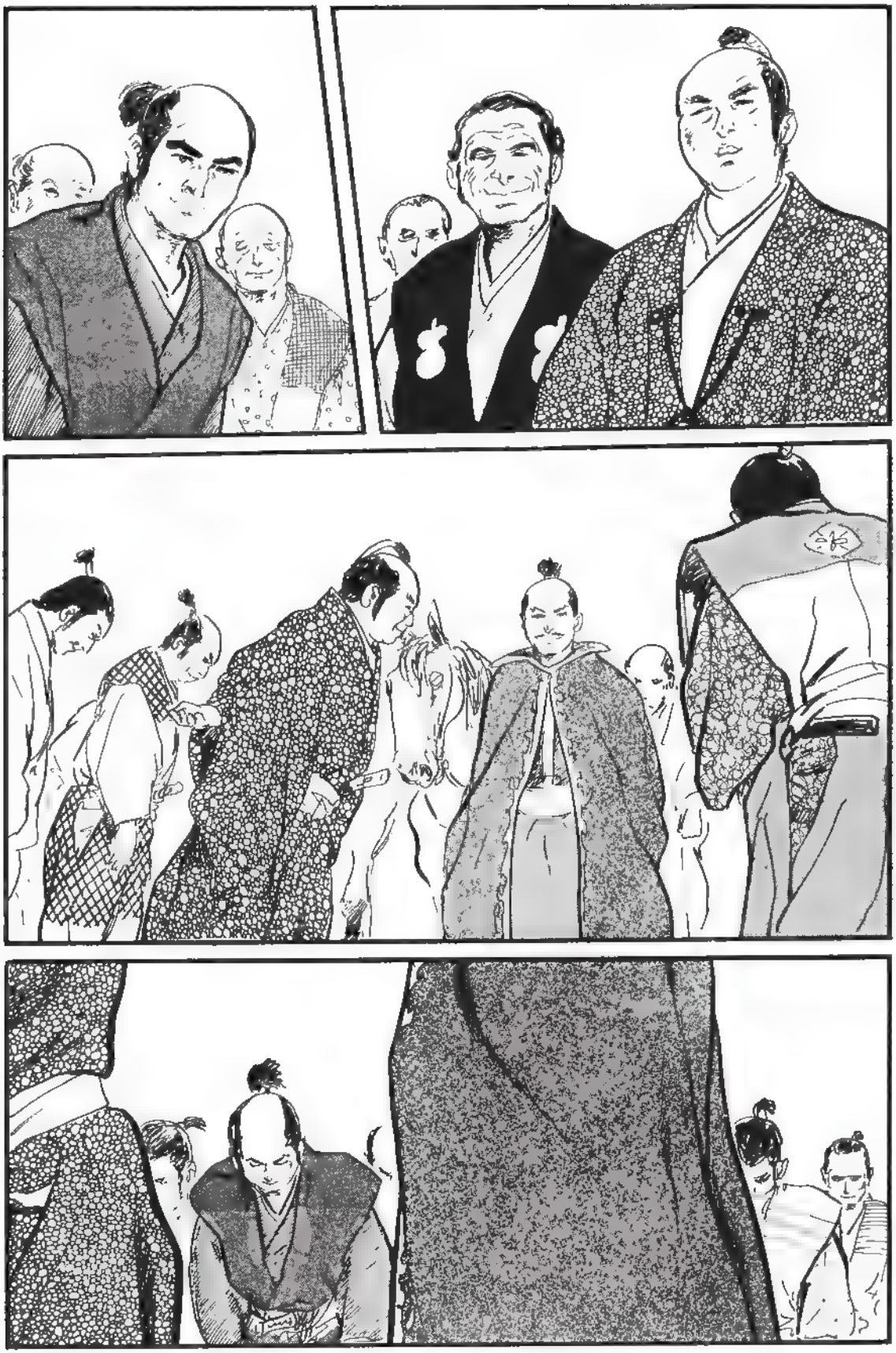

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU DIDN'T NOTICE HE WORE SOCKS UNTIL HE WAS FIFTEEN. HO HO HO HO.
PROOF IS STRONGER THAN ARGU-MENT.
IT GOES TO SHOW YOU HOW MUCH YOU'VE NEGLECTED HIM.
THEY DON'T EAT TOGETHER, EITHER. JUST LIKE YOU AND ME.
ONE MORE THING. HE HASN'T HAD SEX WITH GOTOKU YET.

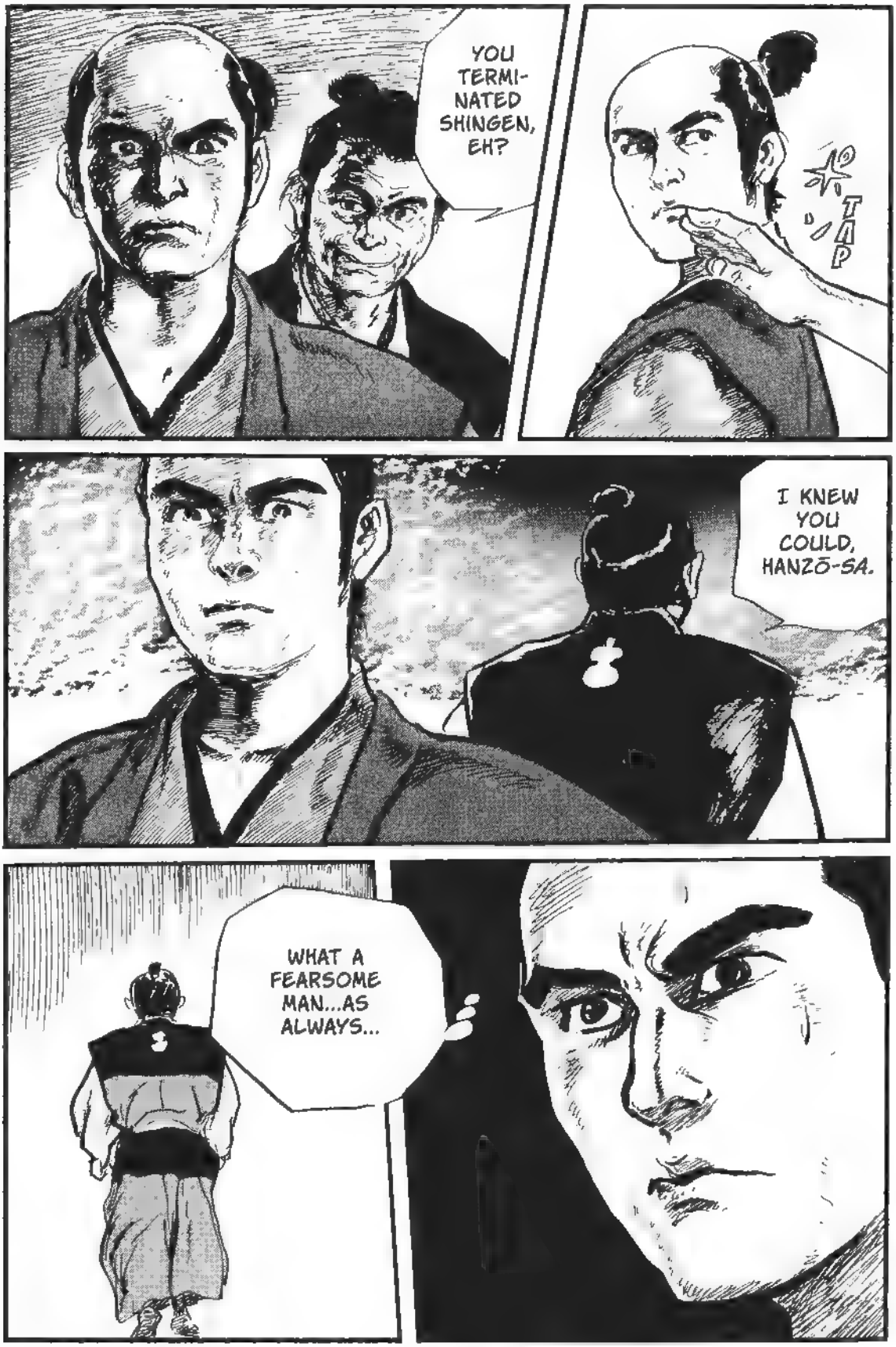
I ALSO TOLD HIM NOT TO HAVE HER AROUND WHEN HE EATS.
I TOLD HIM HE DOESN'T HAVE TO SLEEP WITH NOBUNAGA'S DAUGHTER.

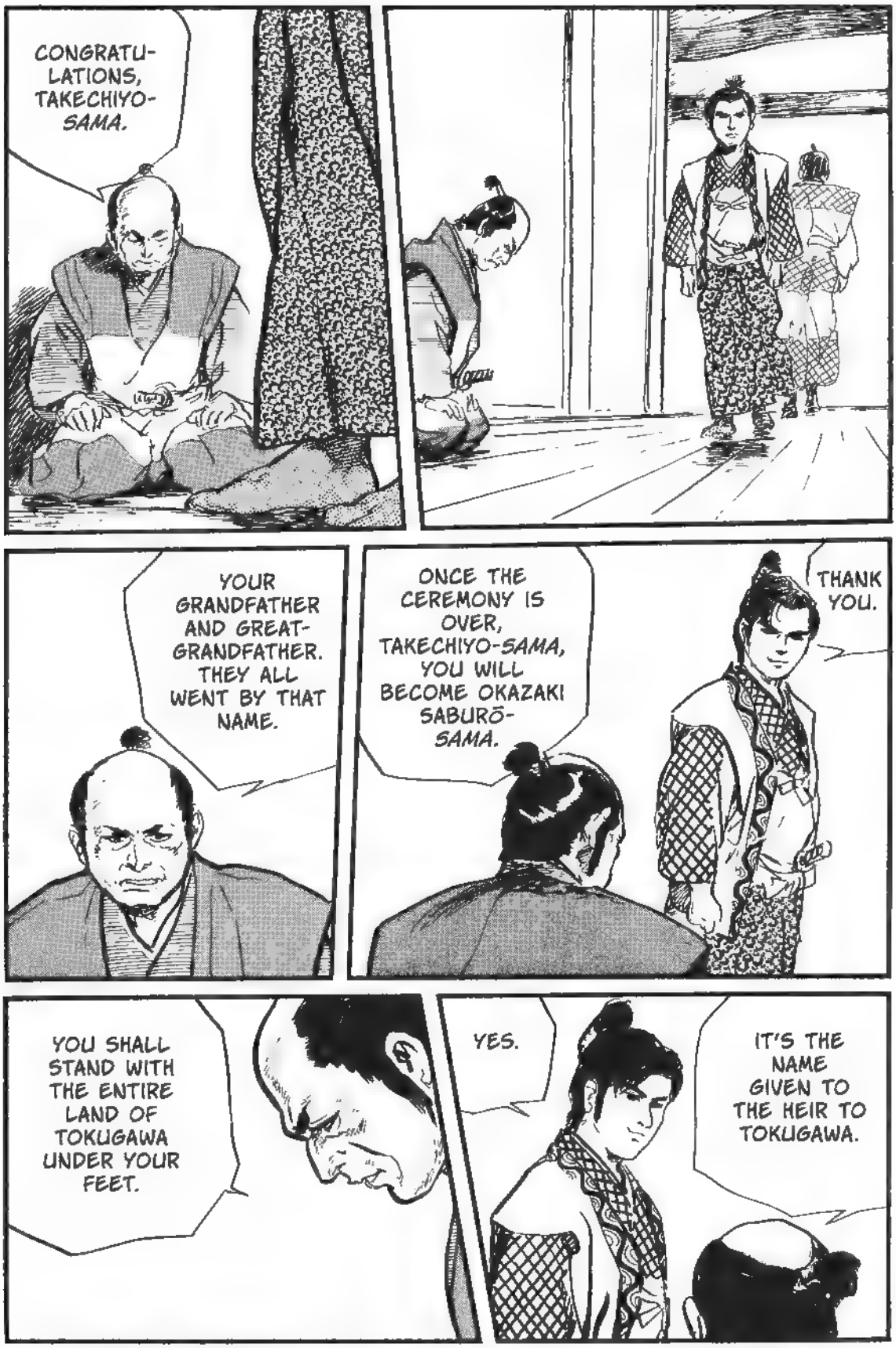
IEYASU FELT HE WAS TOO LATE TO TAKE HALF A STEP BACK... A SOURCE OF TERRIBLE MISFORTUNE HAD ALREADY GROWN TOO BIG INSIDE.

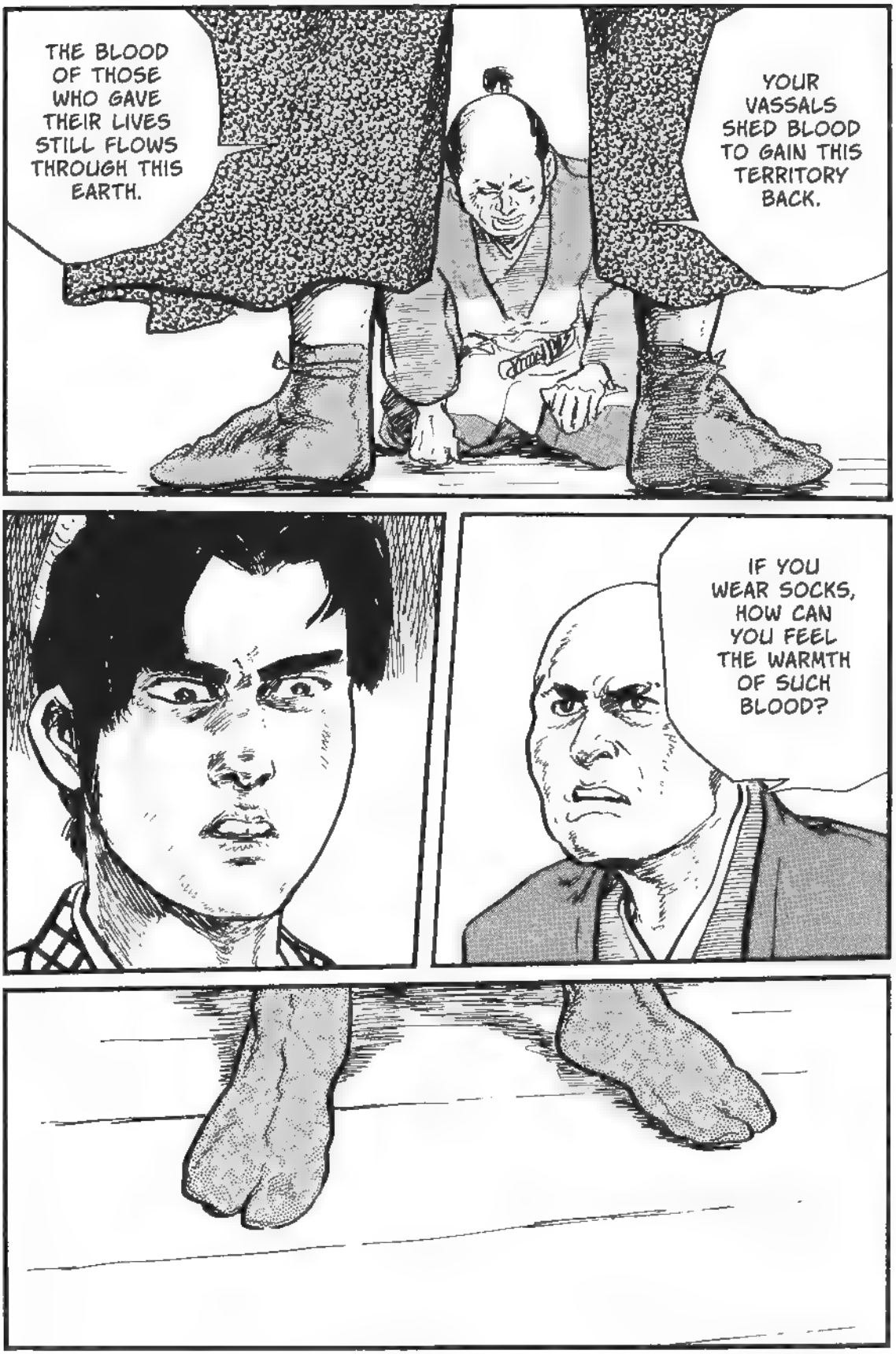
AND IMAGAWA WAS STILL THERE, ALIVE...
HO
HO
HO
HO

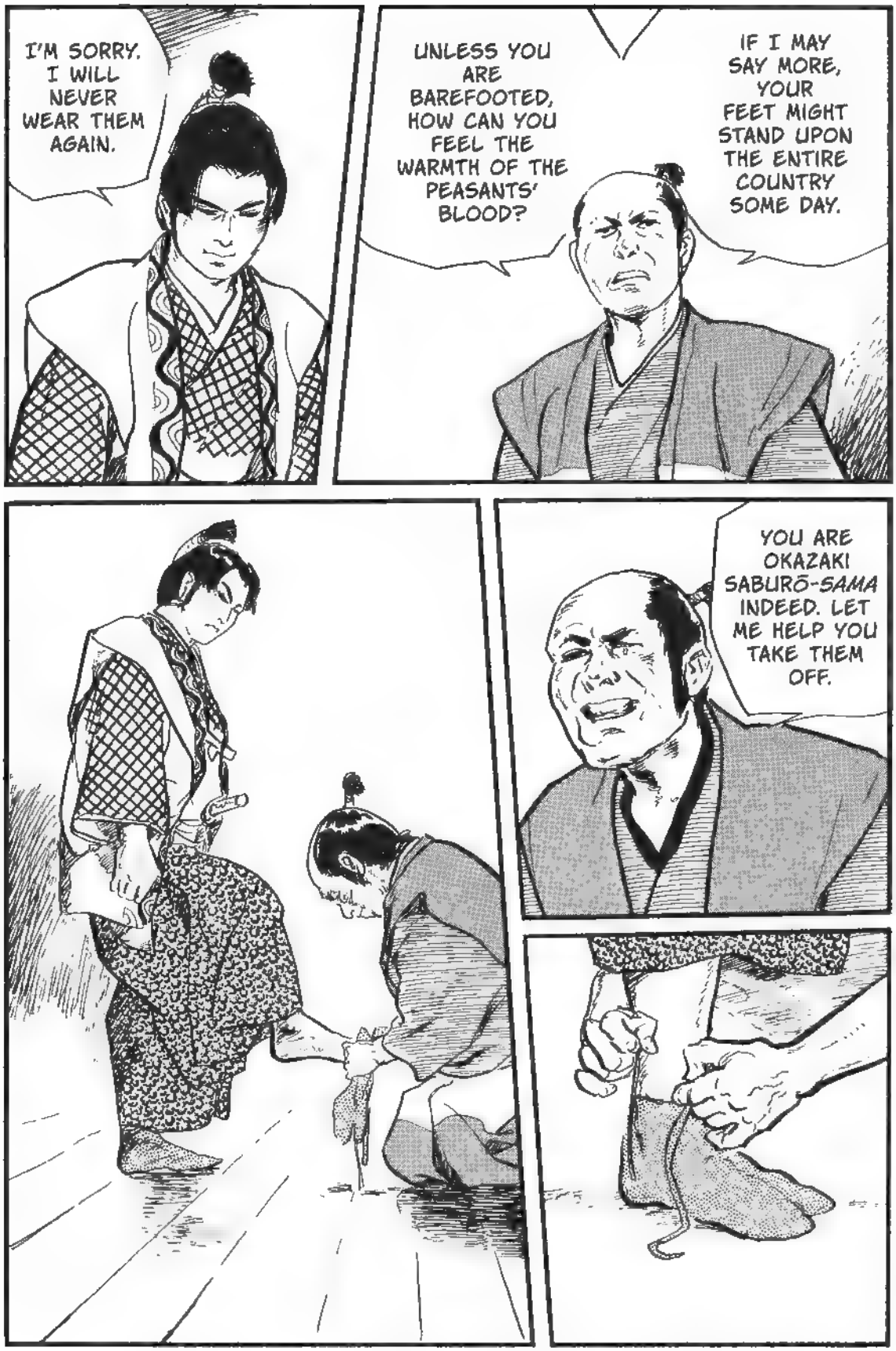


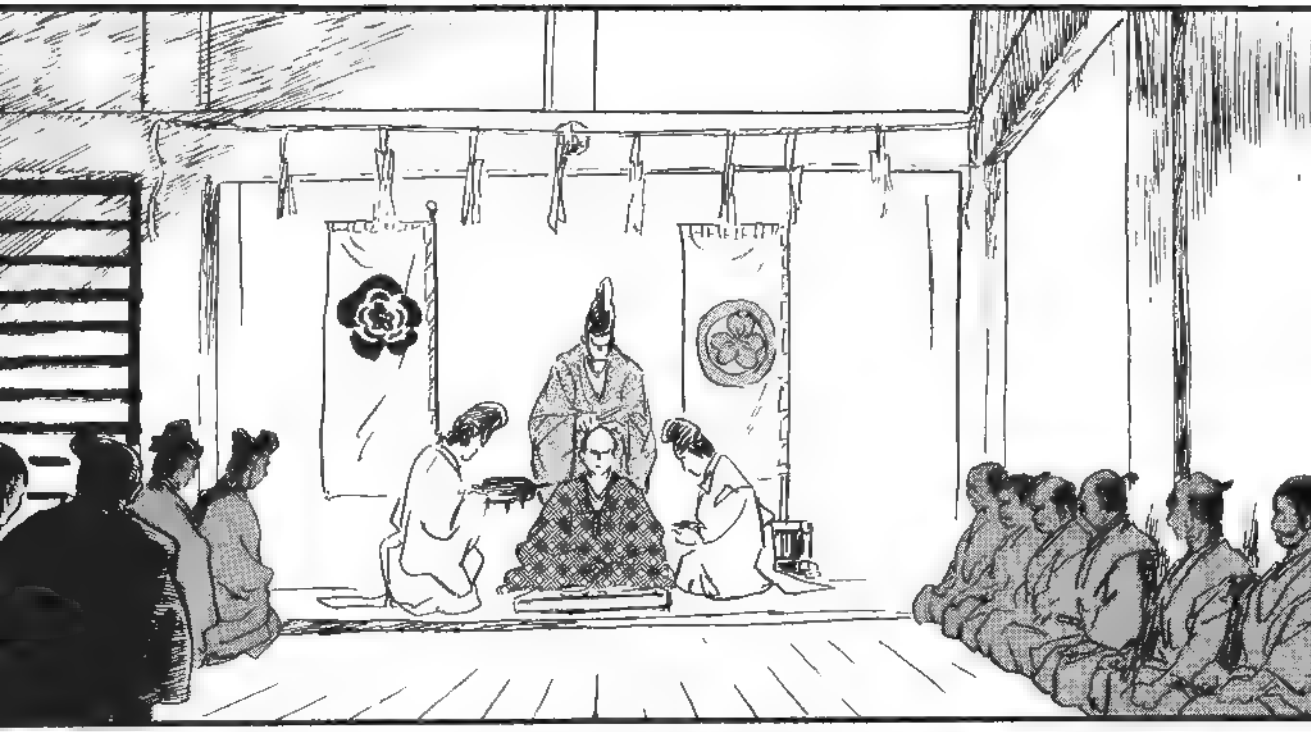



YOU TERMI-NATED SHINGEN, EH?
TAP
I KNEW YOU COULD, HANZŌ-SA.
WHAT A FEARSOME MAN...AS ALWAYS...


CONGRATULATIONS, TAKECHIYO-SAMA.
YOUR GRANDFATHER AND GREAT-GRANDFATHER. THEY ALL WENT BY THAT NAME.
ONCE THE CEREMONY IS OVER, TAKECHIYO-SAMA, YOU WILL BECOME OKAZAKI SABURŌ-SAMA.
THANK YOU.
YOU SHALL STAND WITH THE ENTIRE LAND OF TOKUGAWA UNDER YOUR FEET.
YES.
IT'S THE NAME GIVEN TO THE HEIR TO TOKUGAWA.


THE BLOOD OF THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES STILL FLOWS THROUGH THIS EARTH.
YOUR VASSALS SHED BLOOD TO GAIN THIS TERRITORY BACK.
IF YOU WEAR SOCKS, HOW CAN YOU FEEL THE WARMTH OF SUCH BLOOD?


I'M SORRY. I WILL NEVER WEAR THEM AGAIN.
UNLESS YOU ARE BAREFOOTED, HOW CAN YOU FEEL THE WARMTH OF THE PEASANTS' BLOOD?
IF I MAY SAY MORE, YOUR FEET MIGHT STAND UPON THE ENTIRE COUNTRY SOME DAY.
YOU ARE OKAZAKI SABURŌ-*SAMA* INDEED. LET ME HELP YOU TAKE THEM OFF.

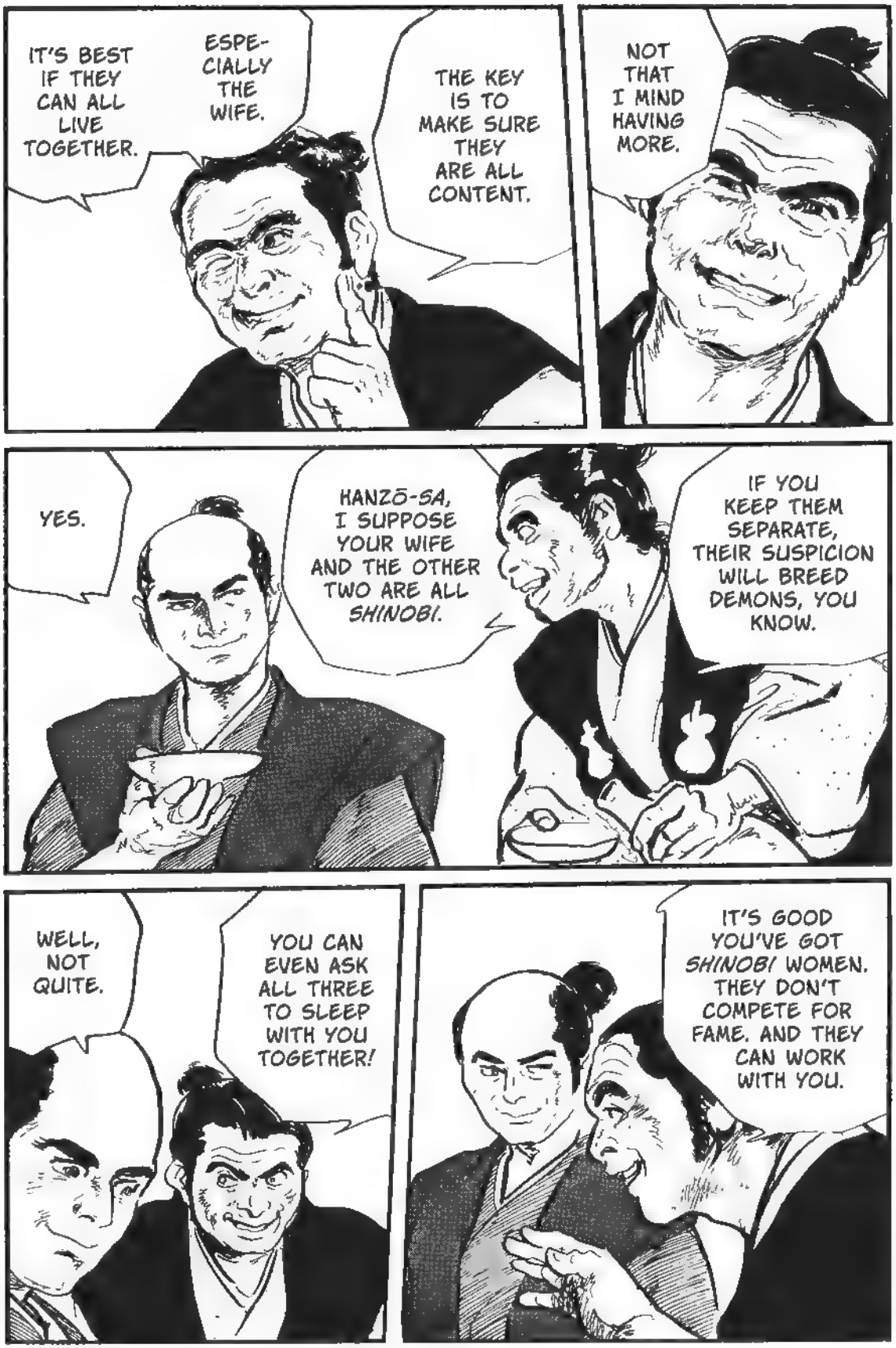


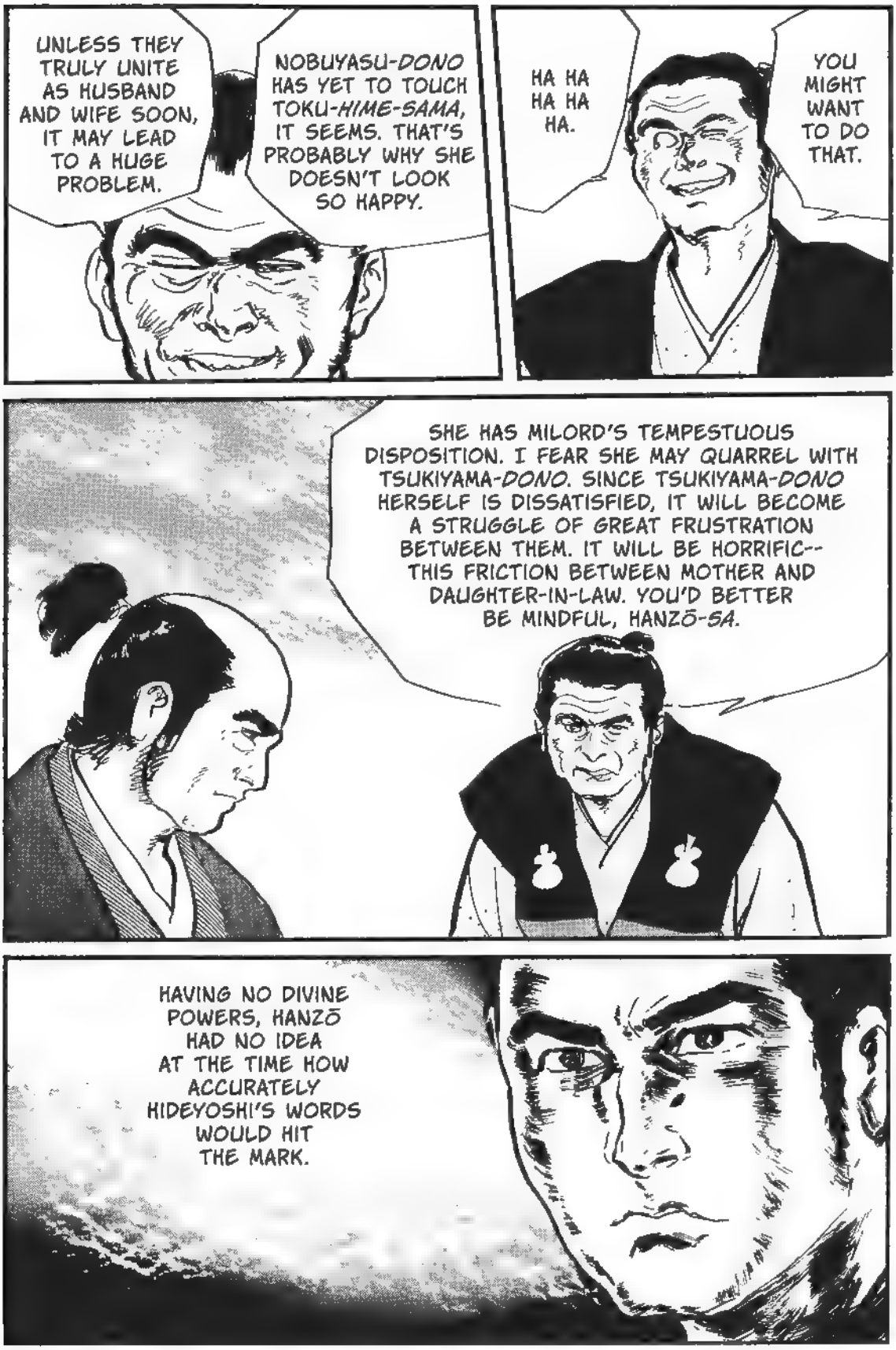
HOW ABOUT IT? GOOD NAME, EH?
I SHALL GIVE YOU THE "NOBU" OF NOBUNAGA. SO YOU ARE OKAZAKI SABURŌ NOBUYASU.
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP

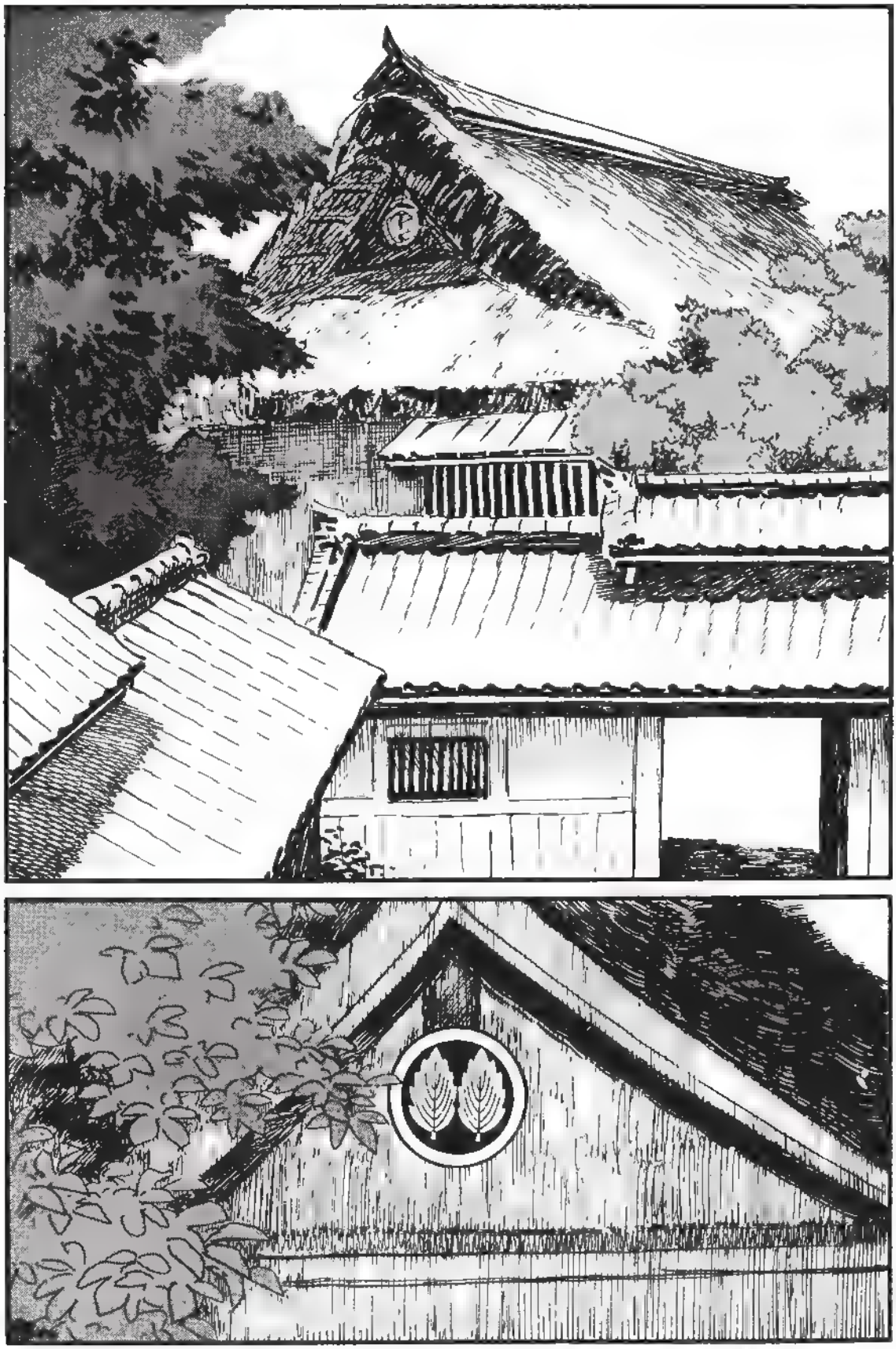
HM. WHAT A FINE YOUNG SAMURAI. VERY DIGNIFIED.
I AM GRATEFUL. THANK YOU.
DIGNIFIED INDEED, NOBUYASU.

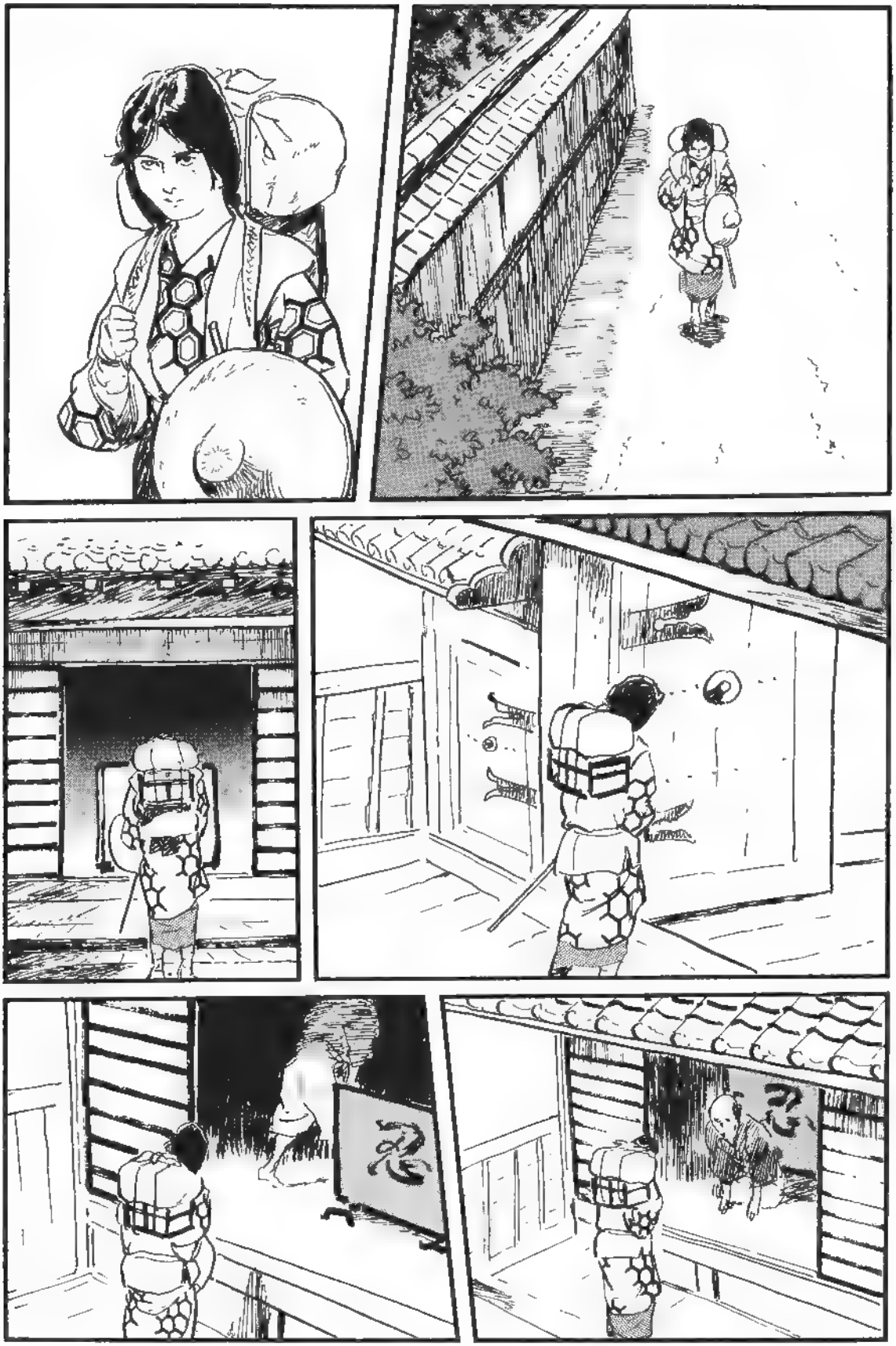
DD'FHAP
EIP
WHY IS THAT?!
IT'S MY SON'S *GENPUKU!* WHY AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO ISN'T ALLOWED TO ATTEND THE BANQUET?
WHY IS THAT?!
WHY CAN'T I? WHEN GOTOKU CAN?!
SLURP

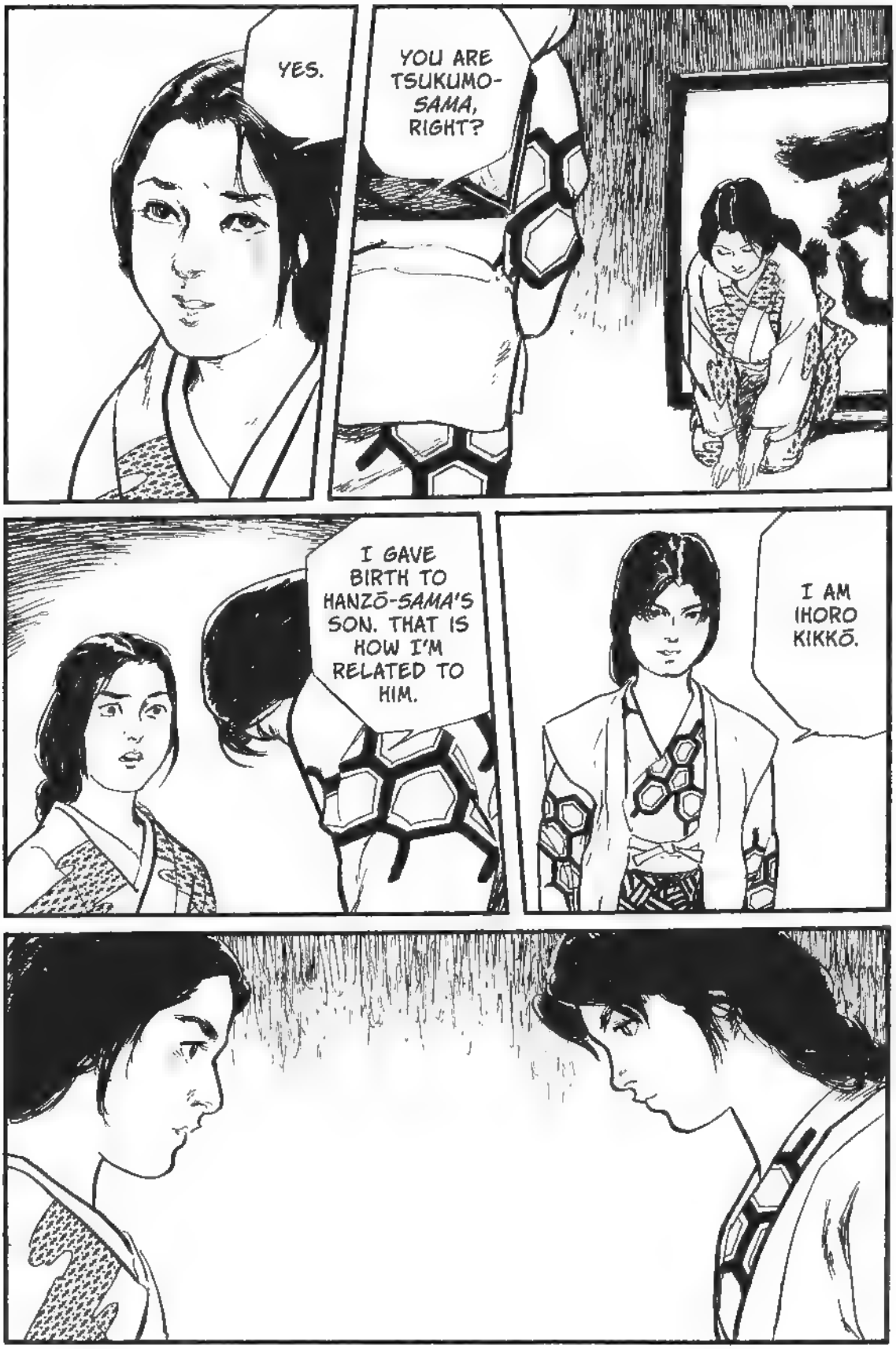
KA-POM
カポン
KA-POM
カポン
HANZŌ-SA, HOW MANY NOW?
THE MORE WOMEN, THE MERRIER.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING, IT'S SCARY TO THINK HOW MANY I'LL HAVE!
FIVE FOR ME.

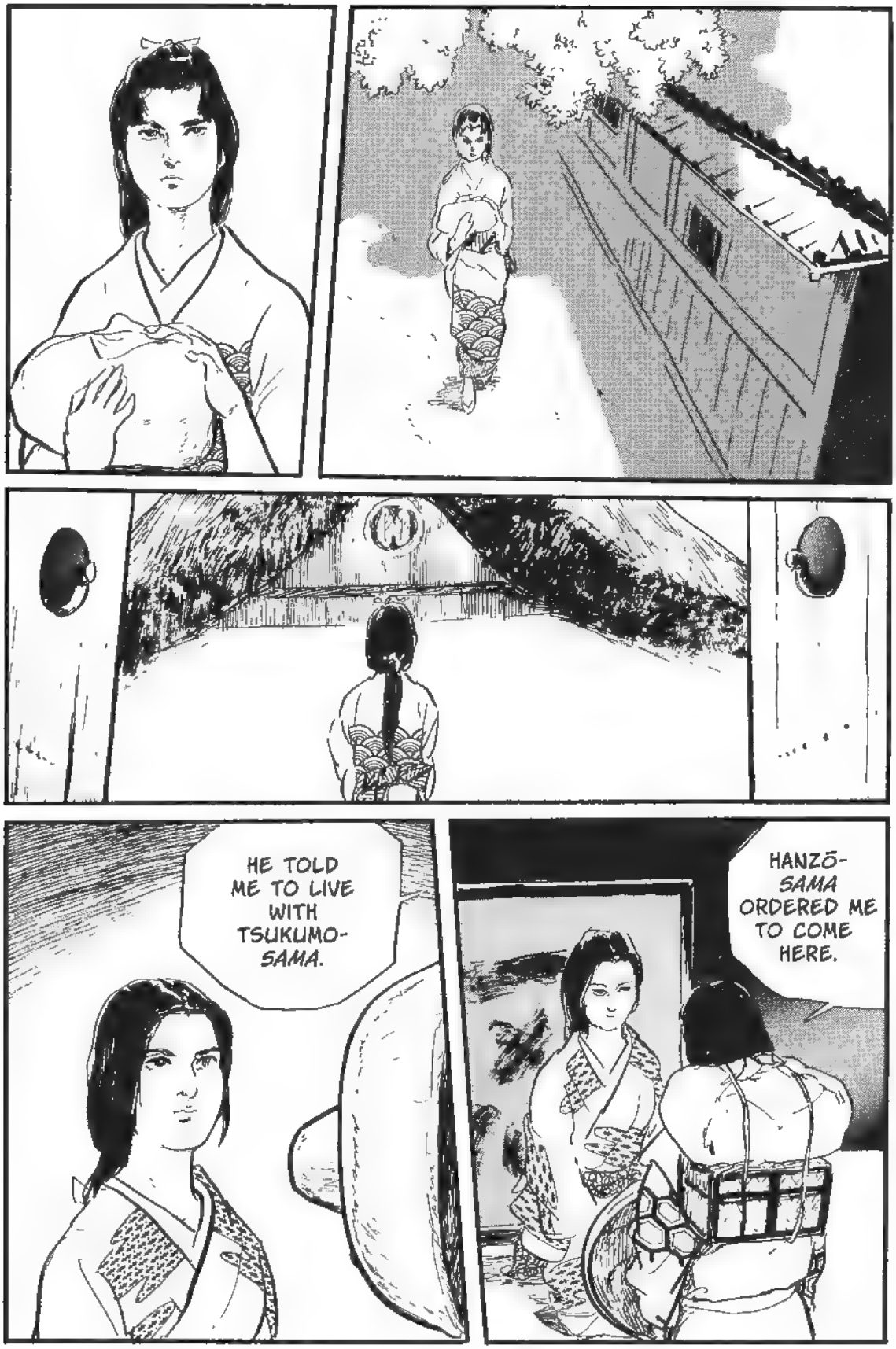

IT'S BEST IF THEY CAN ALL LIVE TOGETHER.
ESPECIALLY THE WIFE.
THE KEY IS TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE ALL CONTENT.
NOT THAT I MIND HAVING MORE.
YES.
HANZŌ-SA, I SUPPOSE YOUR WIFE AND THE OTHER TWO ARE ALL SHINOBI.
IF YOU KEEP THEM SEPARATE, THEIR SUSPICION WILL BREED DEMONS, YOU KNOW.
WELL, NOT QUITE.
YOU CAN EVEN ASK ALL THREE TO SLEEP WITH YOU TOGETHER!
IT'S GOOD YOU'VE GOT SHINOBI WOMEN. THEY DON'T COMPETE FOR FAME. AND THEY CAN WORK WITH YOU.


UNLESS THEY TRULY UNITE AS HUSBAND AND WIFE SOON, IT MAY LEAD TO A HUGE PROBLEM.
NOBUYASU-*DONO* HAS YET TO TOUCH TOKU-*HIME-SAMA*, IT SEEMS. THAT'S PROBABLY WHY SHE DOESN'T LOOK SO HAPPY.
HA HA HA HA HA.
YOU MIGHT WANT TO DO THAT.
SHE HAS MILORD'S TEMPESTUOUS DISPOSITION. I FEAR SHE MAY QUARREL WITH TSUKIYAMA-*DONO*. SINCE TSUKIYAMA-*DONO* HERSELF IS DISSATISFIED, IT WILL BECOME A STRUGGLE OF GREAT FRUSTRATION BETWEEN THEM. IT WILL BE HORRIFIC--THIS FRICTION BETWEEN MOTHER AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. YOU'D BETTER BE MINDFUL, HANZŌ-*SA*.
HAVING NO DIVINE POWERS, HANZŌ HAD NO IDEA AT THE TIME HOW ACCURATELY HIDEYOSHI'S WORDS WOULD HIT THE MARK.

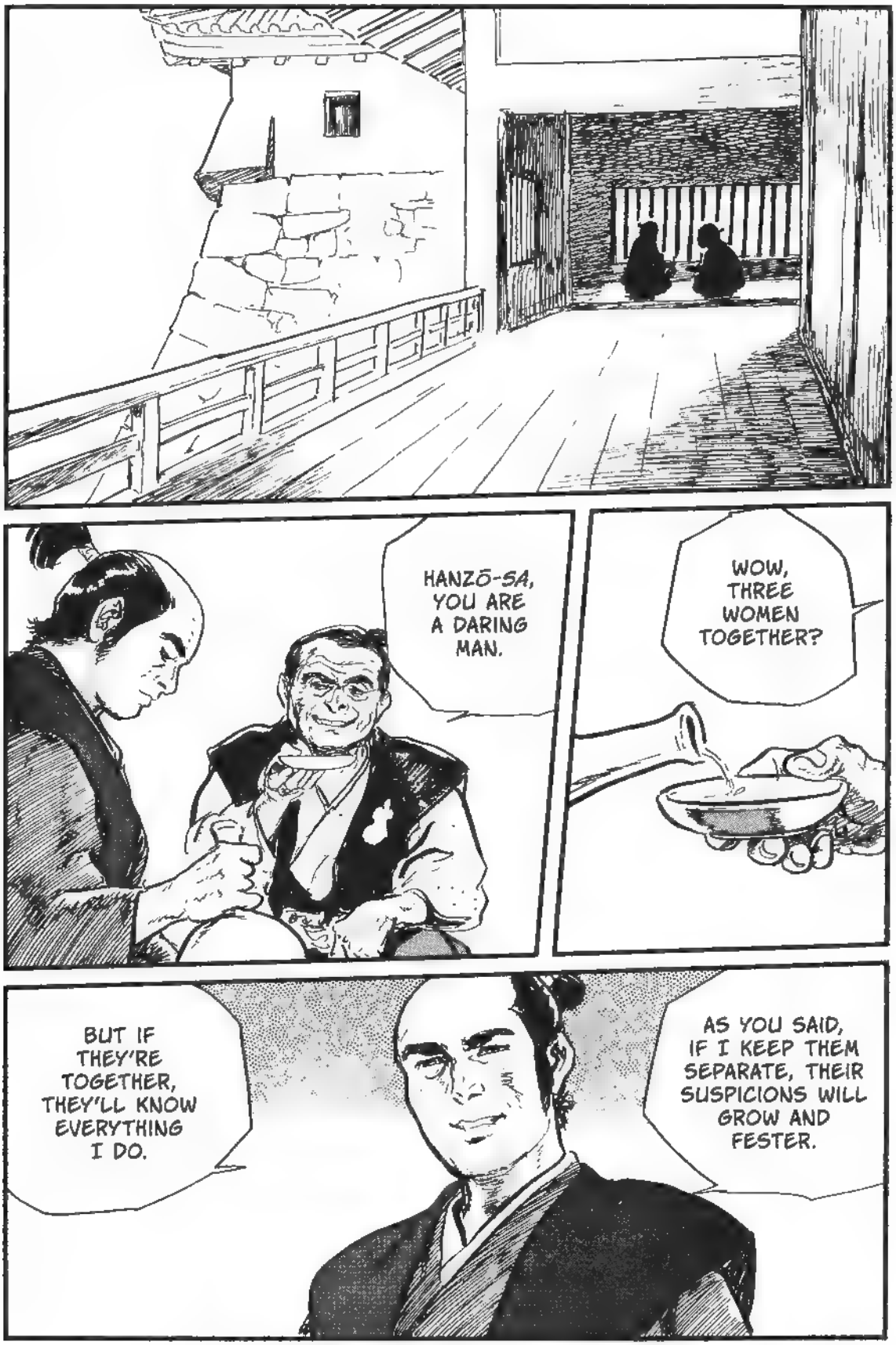


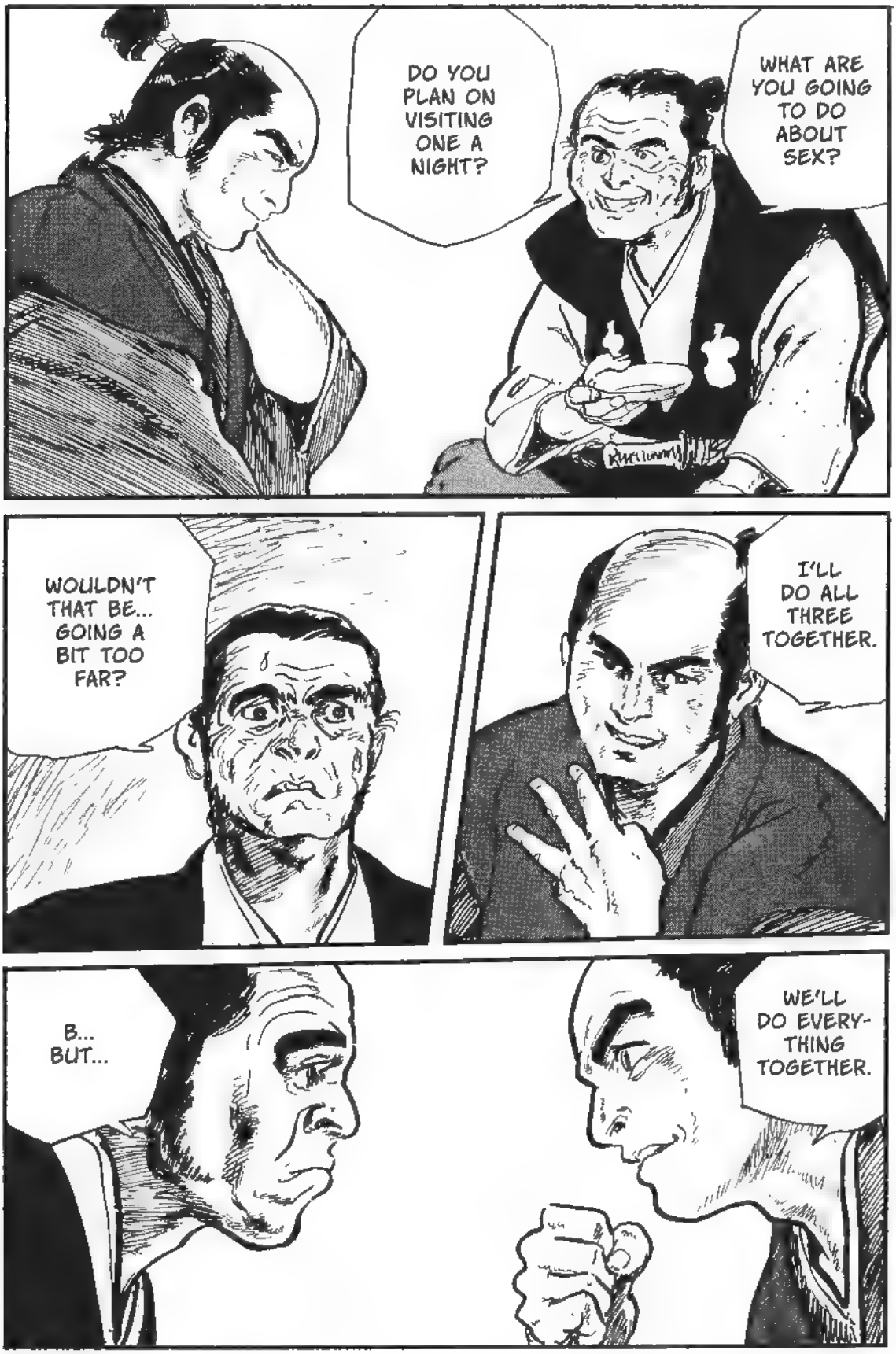


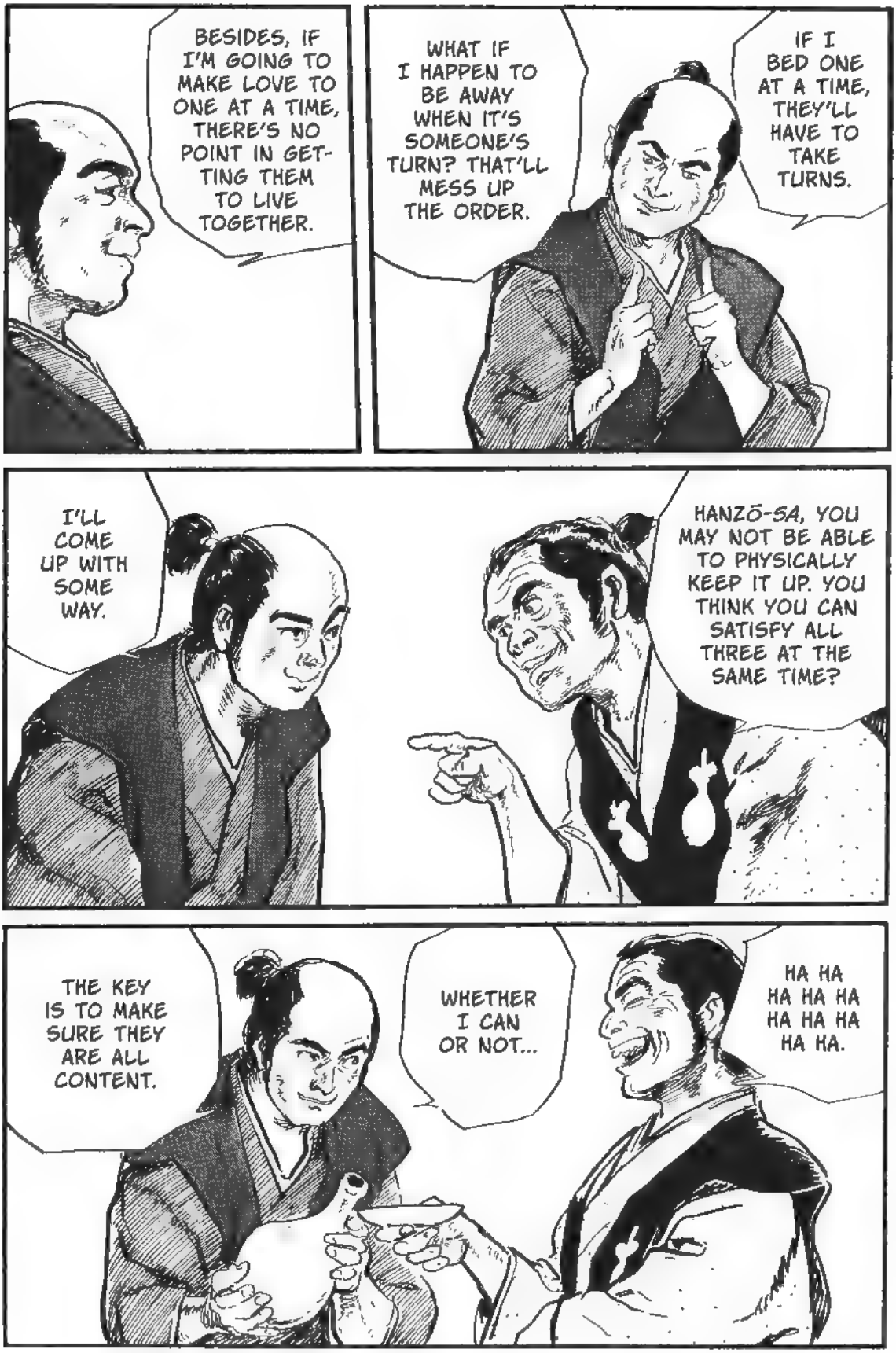

YES.
YOU ARE TSUKUMO-SAMA, RIGHT?
I GAVE BIRTH TO HANZŌ-SAMA'S SON. THAT IS HOW I'M RELATED TO HIM.
I AM IHORO KIKKŌ.

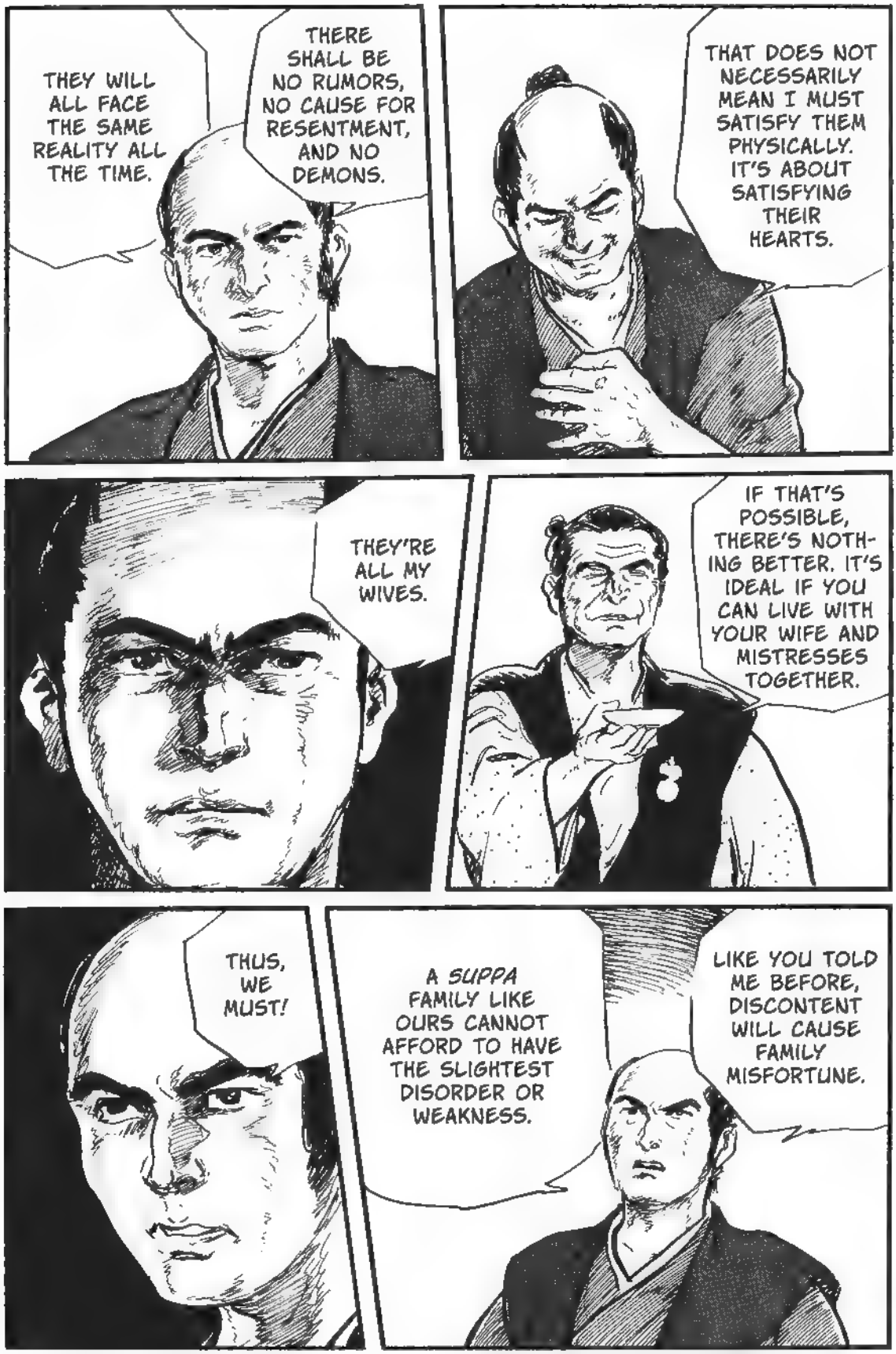

HE TOLD ME TO LIVE WITH TSUKUMO-SAMA.
HANZŌ-SAMA ORDERED ME TO COME HERE.

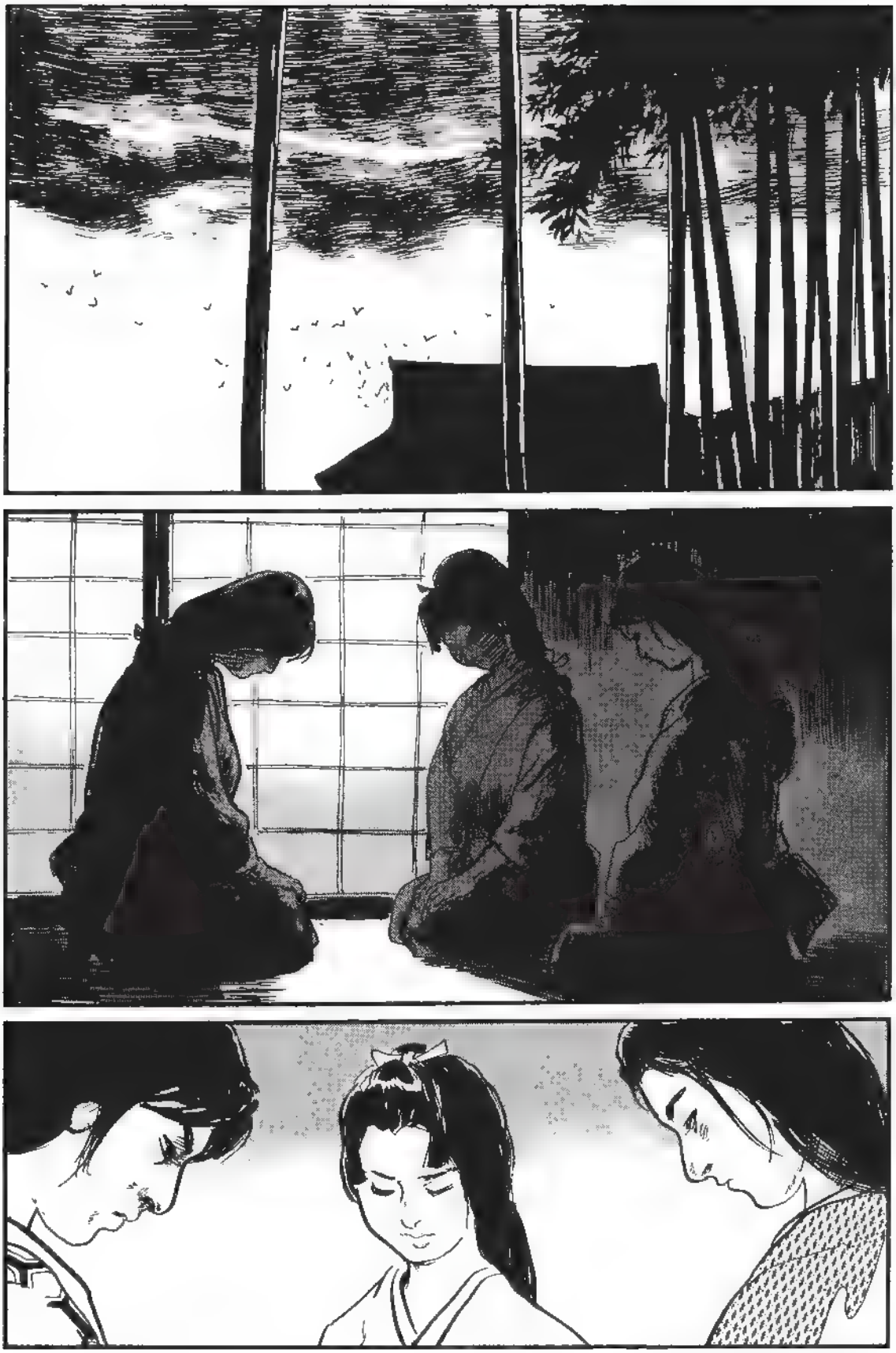
I'M PLEASED TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINT-ANCE.
I AM TSUKIBUE. I'VE COME UNDER HANZŌ-SAMA'S ORDERS. I AM TO LIVE HERE WITH YOU STARTING TODAY.
I BELIEVE YOU ARE TSUKUMO-SAMA AND KIKKŌ-SAMA.

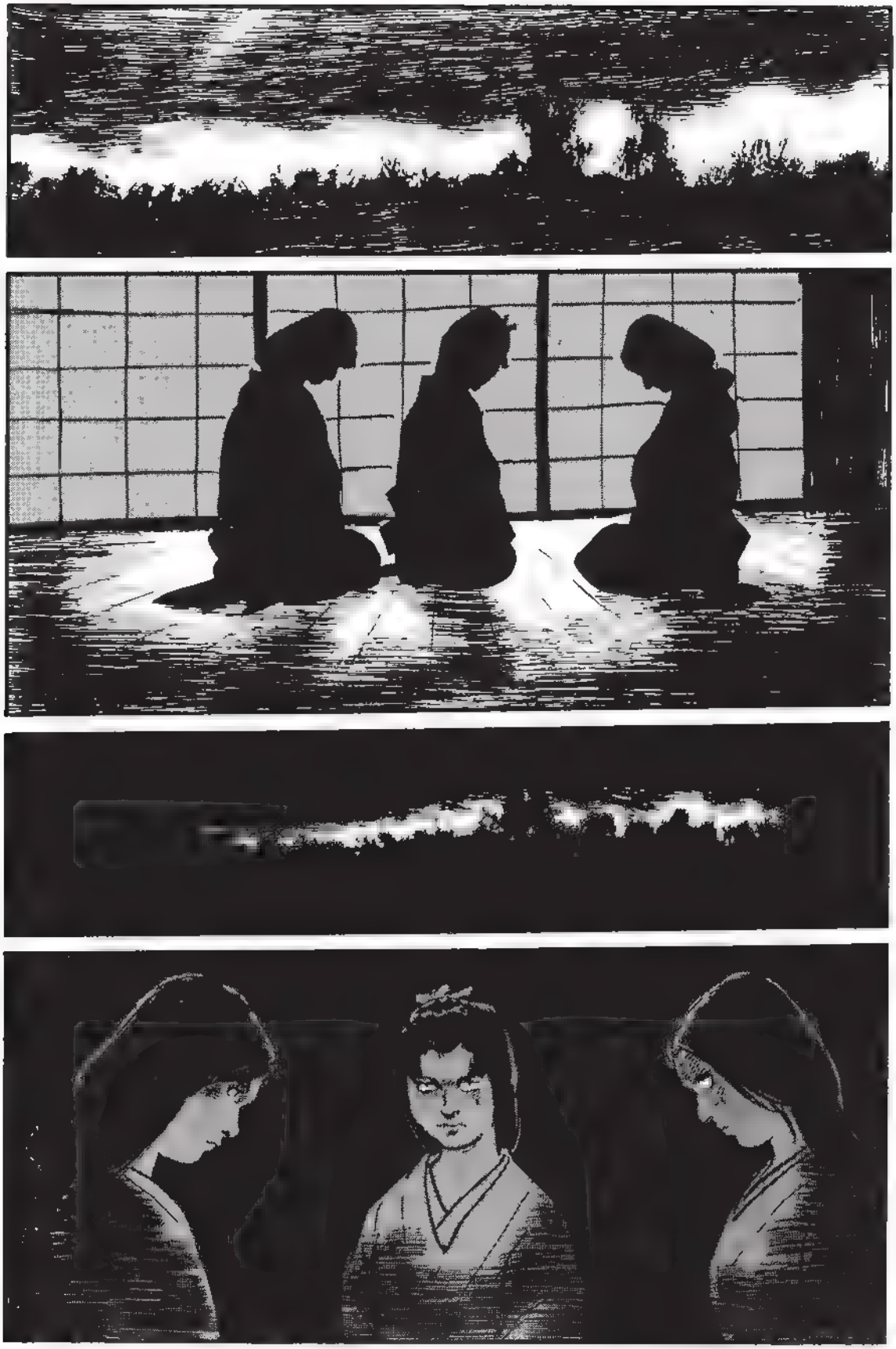

HANZŌ-SA, YOU ARE A DARING MAN.
WOW, THREE WOMEN TOGETHER?
BUT IF THEY'RE TOGETHER, THEY'LL KNOW EVERYTHING I DO.
AS YOU SAID, IF I KEEP THEM SEPARATE, THEIR SUSPICIONS WILL GROW AND FESTER.

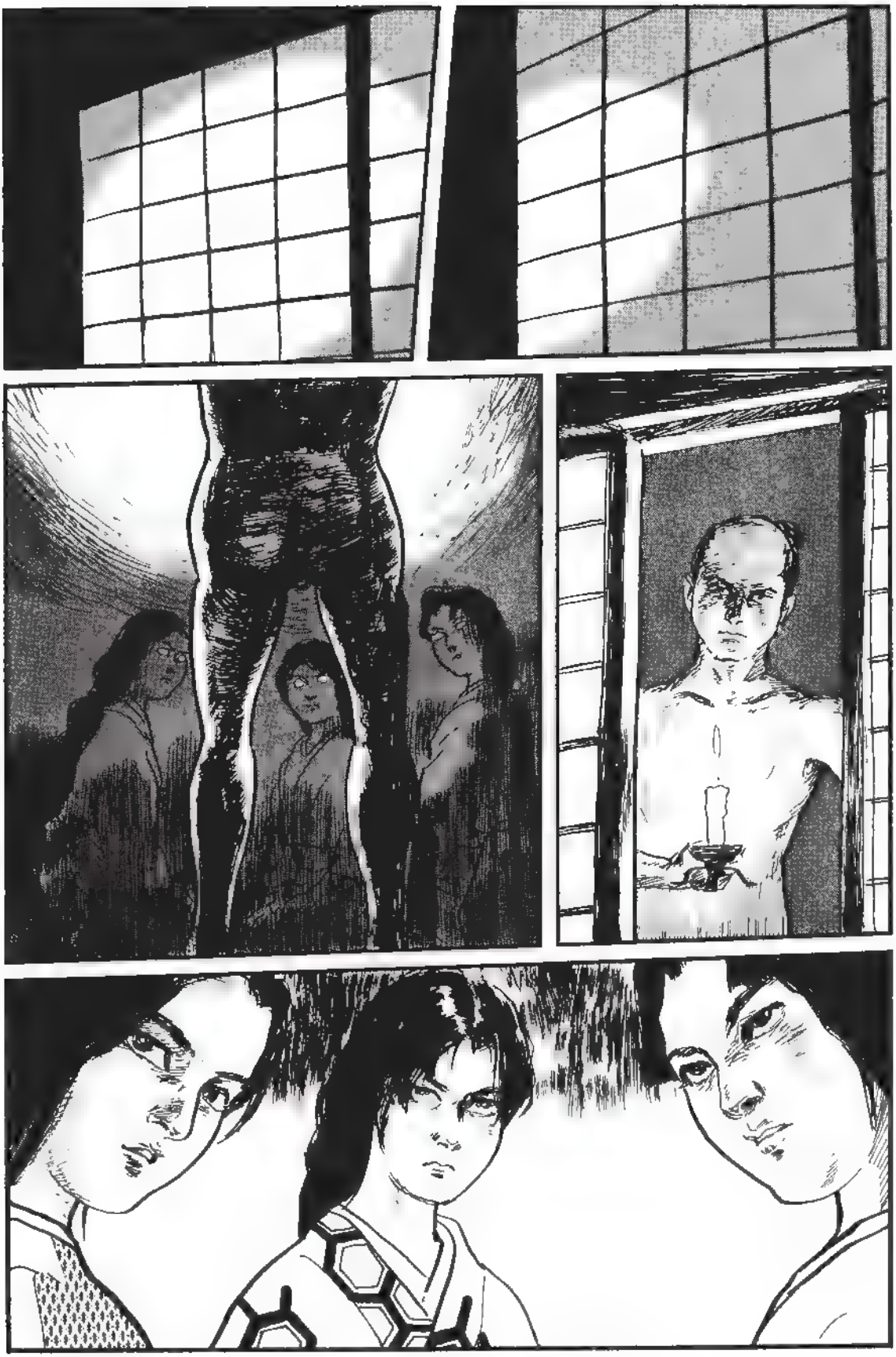

DO YOU PLAN ON VISITING ONE A NIGHT?
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT SEX?
WOULDN'T THAT BE... GOING A BIT TOO FAR?
I'LL DO ALL THREE TOGETHER.
B... BUT...
WE'LL DO EVERY-THING TOGETHER.

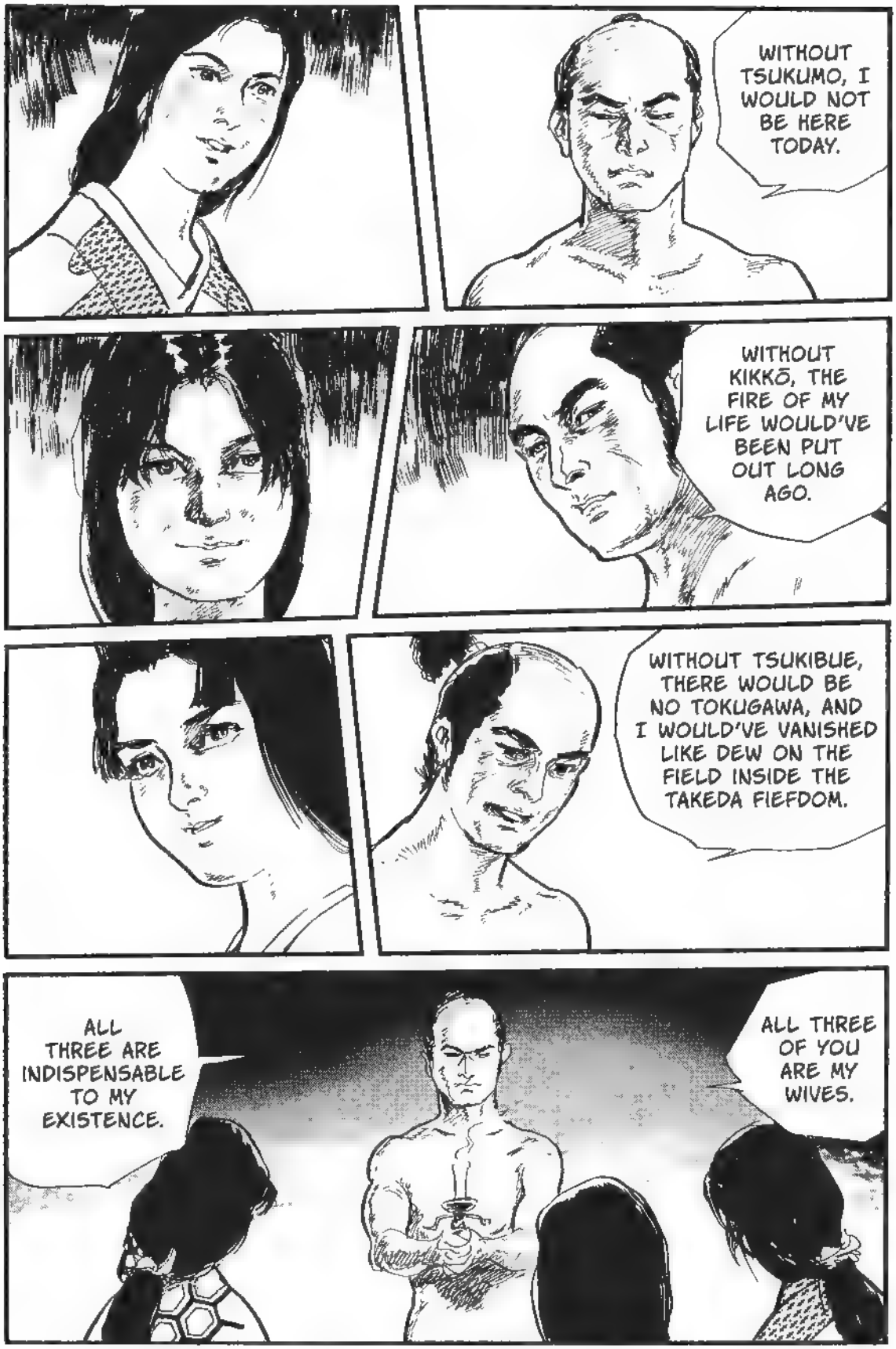

BESIDES, IF I'M GOING TO MAKE LOVE TO ONE AT A TIME, THERE'S NO POINT IN GETTING THEM TO LIVE TOGETHER.
WHAT IF I HAPPEN TO BE AWAY WHEN IT'S SOMEONE'S TURN? THAT'LL MESS UP THE ORDER.
IF I BED ONE AT A TIME, THEY'LL HAVE TO TAKE TURNS.
I'LL COME UP WITH SOME WAY.
HANZŌ-SA, YOU MAY NOT BE ABLE TO PHYSICALLY KEEP IT UP. YOU THINK YOU CAN SATISFY ALL THREE AT THE SAME TIME?
THE KEY IS TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE ALL CONTENT.
WHETHER I CAN OR NOT...
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.


THEY WILL ALL FACE THE SAME REALITY ALL THE TIME.
THERE SHALL BE NO RUMORS, NO CAUSE FOR RESENTMENT, AND NO DEMONS.
THAT DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN I MUST SATISFY THEM PHYSICALLY. IT'S ABOUT SATISFYING THEIR HEARTS.
THEY'RE ALL MY WIVES.
IF THAT'S POSSIBLE, THERE'S NOTHING BETTER. IT'S IDEAL IF YOU CAN LIVE WITH YOUR WIFE AND MISTRESSES TOGETHER.
THUS, WE MUST!
A *SUPPA* FAMILY LIKE OURS CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE THE SLIGHTEST DISORDER OR WEAKNESS.
LIKE YOU TOLD ME BEFORE, DISCONTENT WILL CAUSE FAMILY MISFORTUNE.



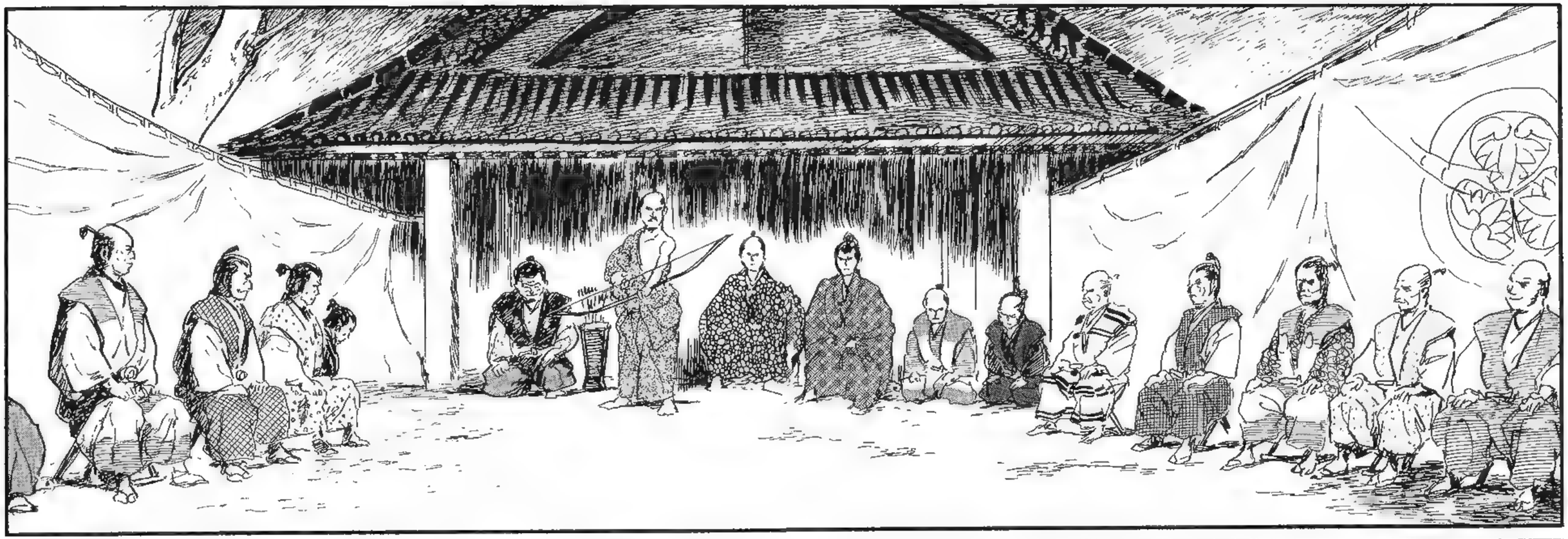


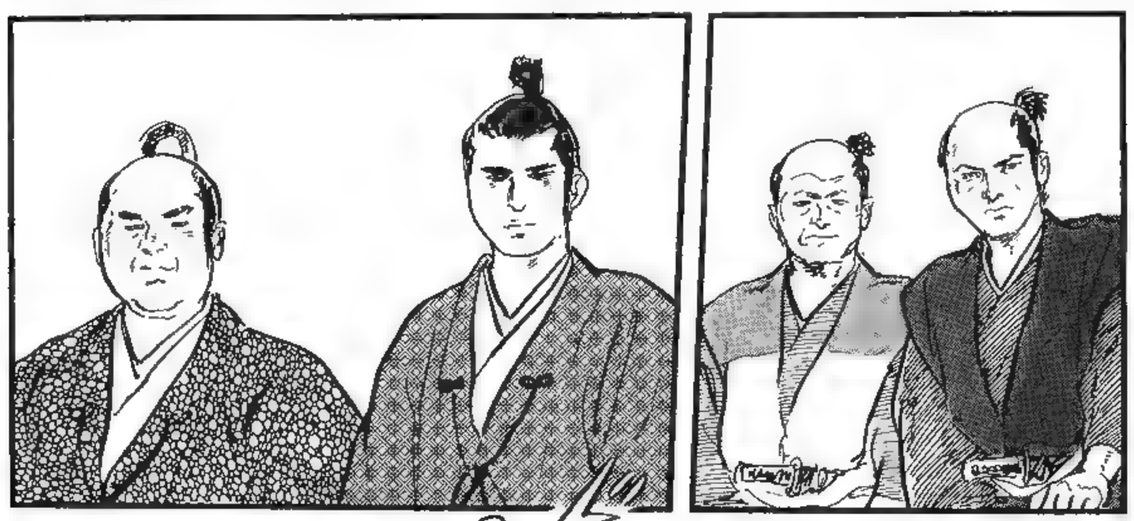


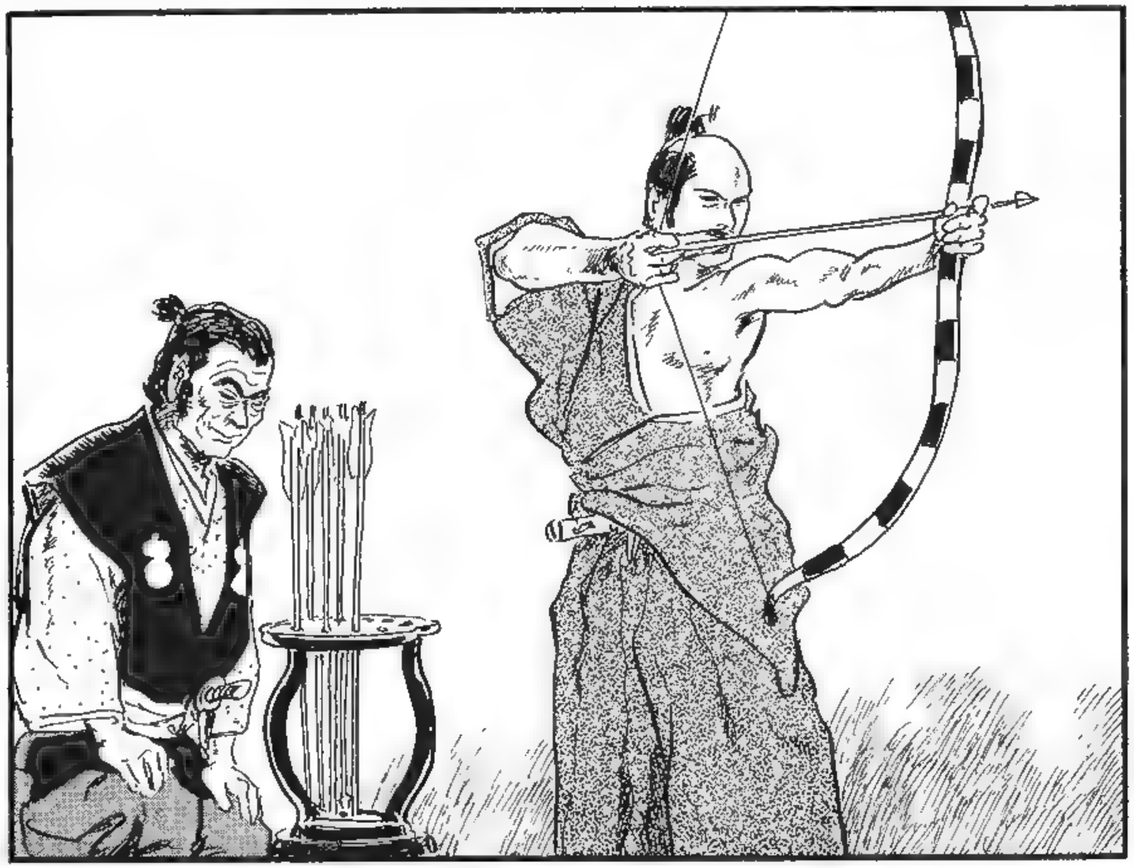

WITHOUT TSUKUMO, I WOULD NOT BE HERE TODAY.
WITHOUT KIKKŌ, THE FIRE OF MY LIFE WOULD'VE BEEN PUT OUT LONG AGO.
WITHOUT TSUKIBUE, THERE WOULD BE NO TOKUGAWA, AND I WOULD'VE VANISHED LIKE DEW ON THE FIELD INSIDE THE TAKEDA FIEFDOM.
ALL THREE ARE INDISPENSABLE TO MY EXISTENCE.
ALL THREE OF YOU ARE MY WIVES.

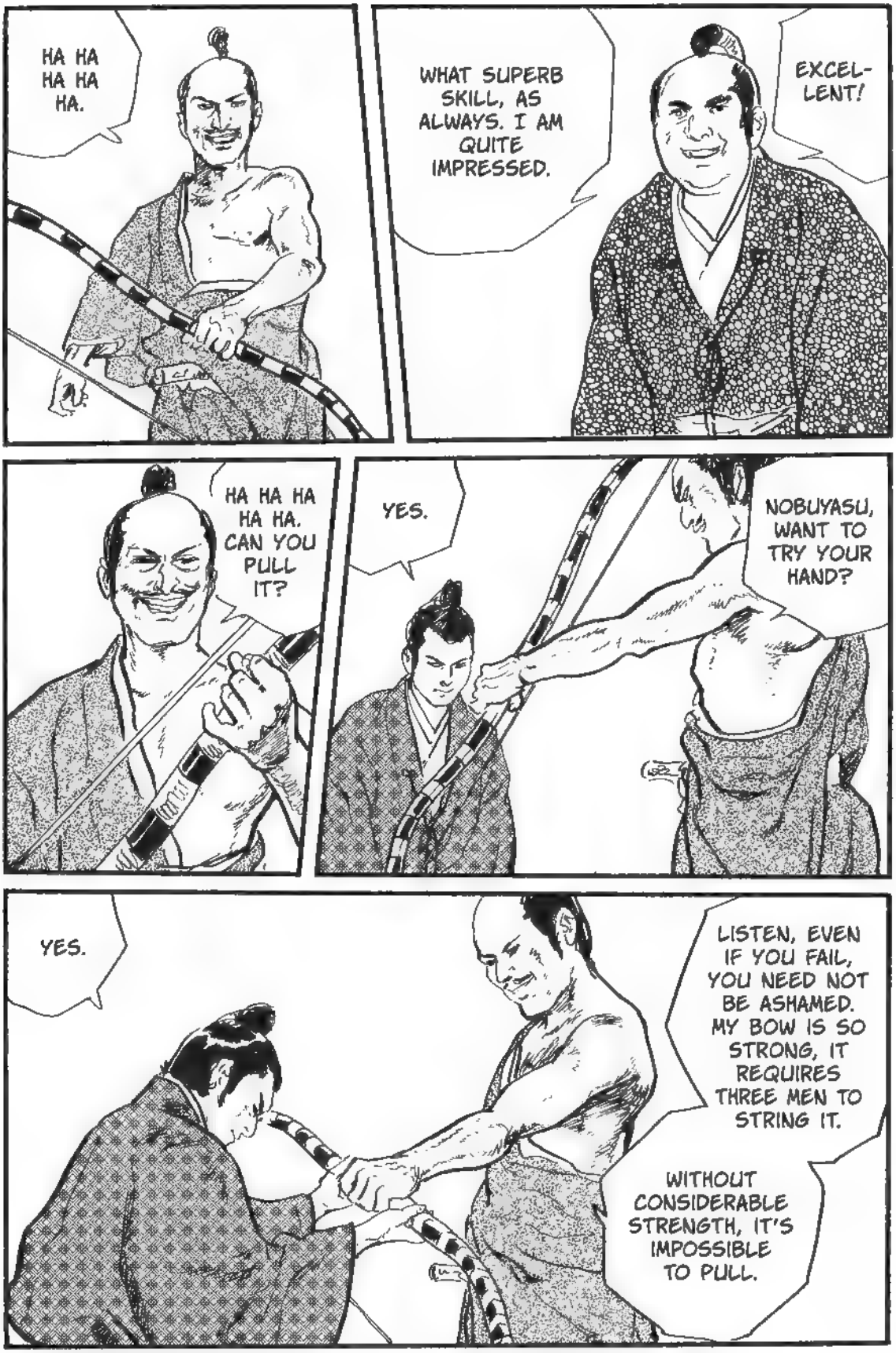
IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, LEAVE.
IF THE THREE OF YOU ARE APART, DRAFTS WILL BLOW THROUGH THE GAPS AND PUT OUT THE LIGHT.
UNLESS YOU ARE ALWAYS TOGETHER AND DO EVERYTHING TOGETHER, THE HOUSE OF HATTORI WILL COLLAPSE.
THREE ARE ONE. ONE IS THREE.
YES.
YOU MANAGE AND MAINTAIN PEACE AT HOME.
YES.
TSU-KUMO.
YES.
YOU OBEY TSUKUMO.
YES.
KIKKŌ. TSUKIBUE.

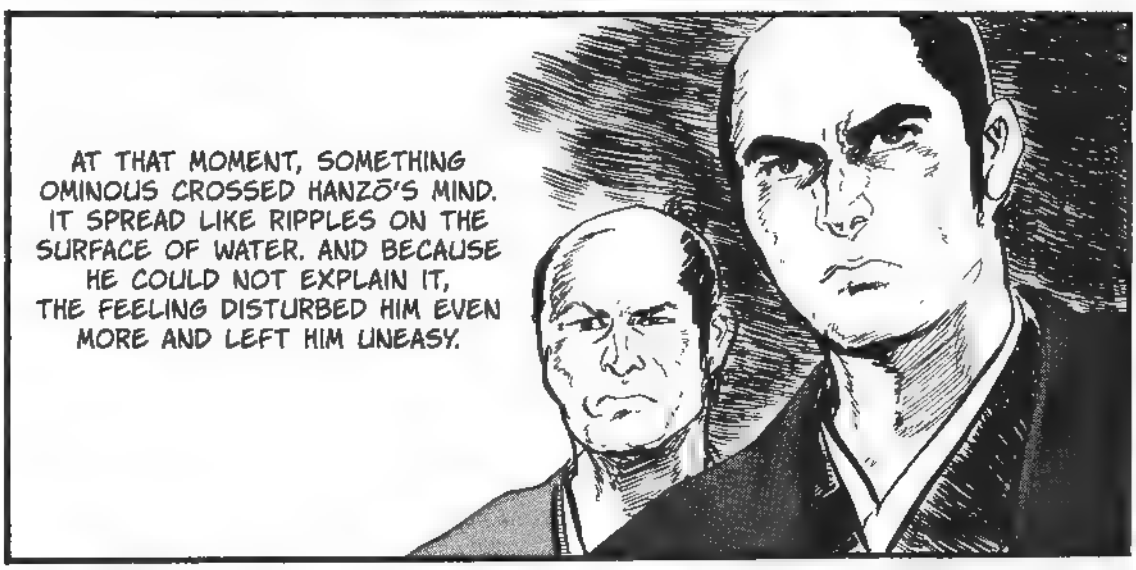
...FOR TOKUGAWA AND FOR MY FAMILY.
NOW I CAN DIE ANYTIME...

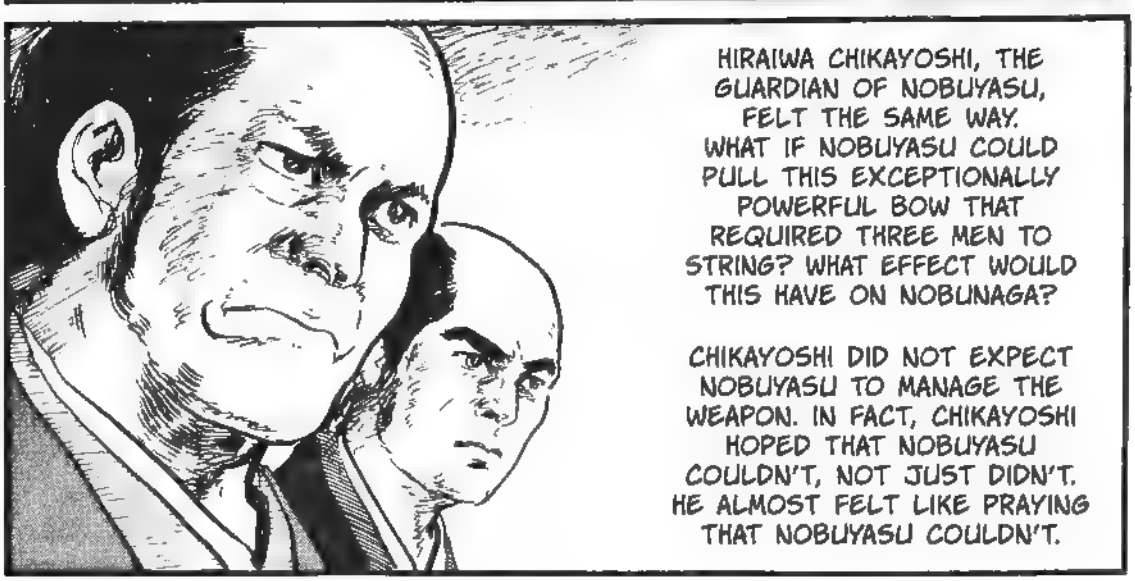


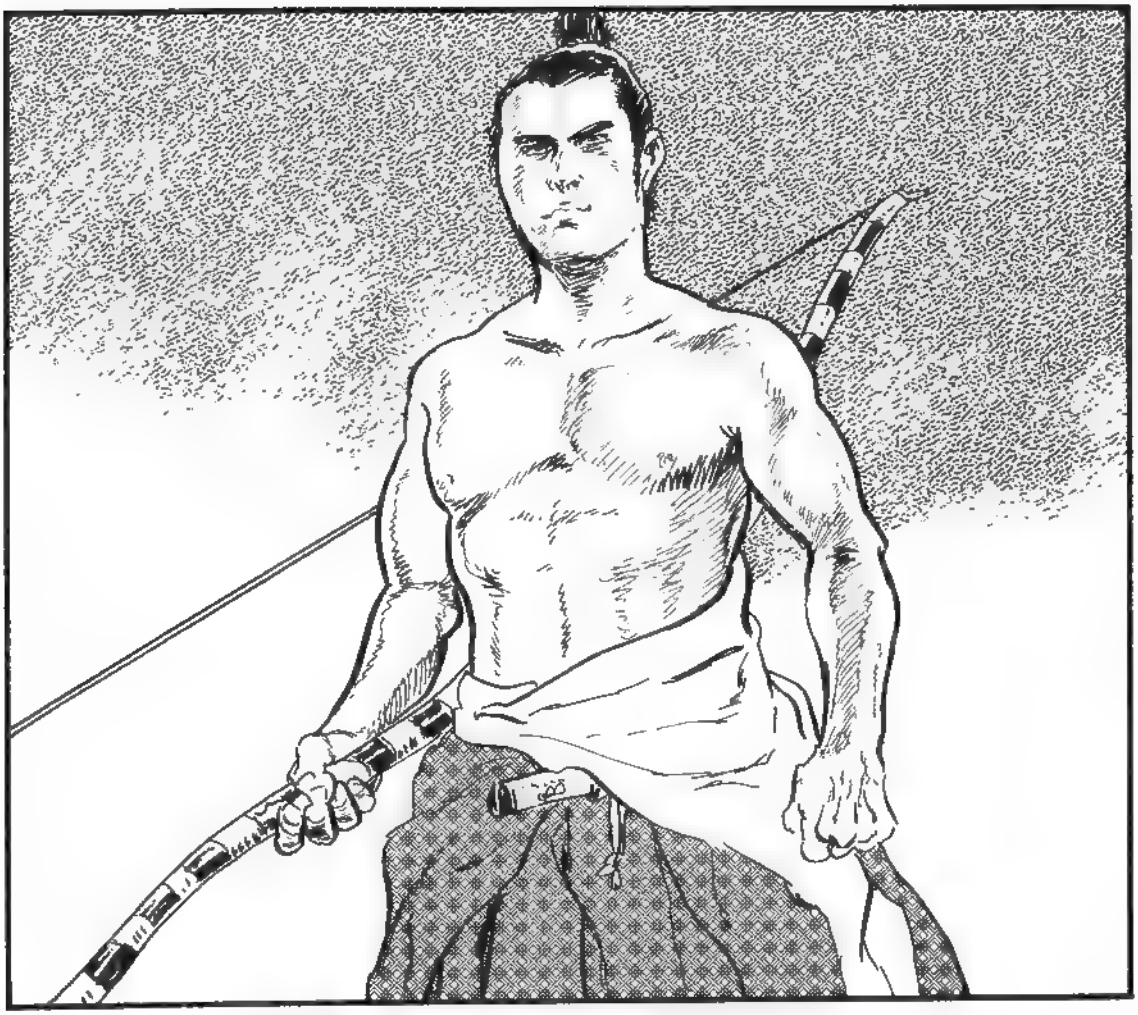

B-
YU
TUNK

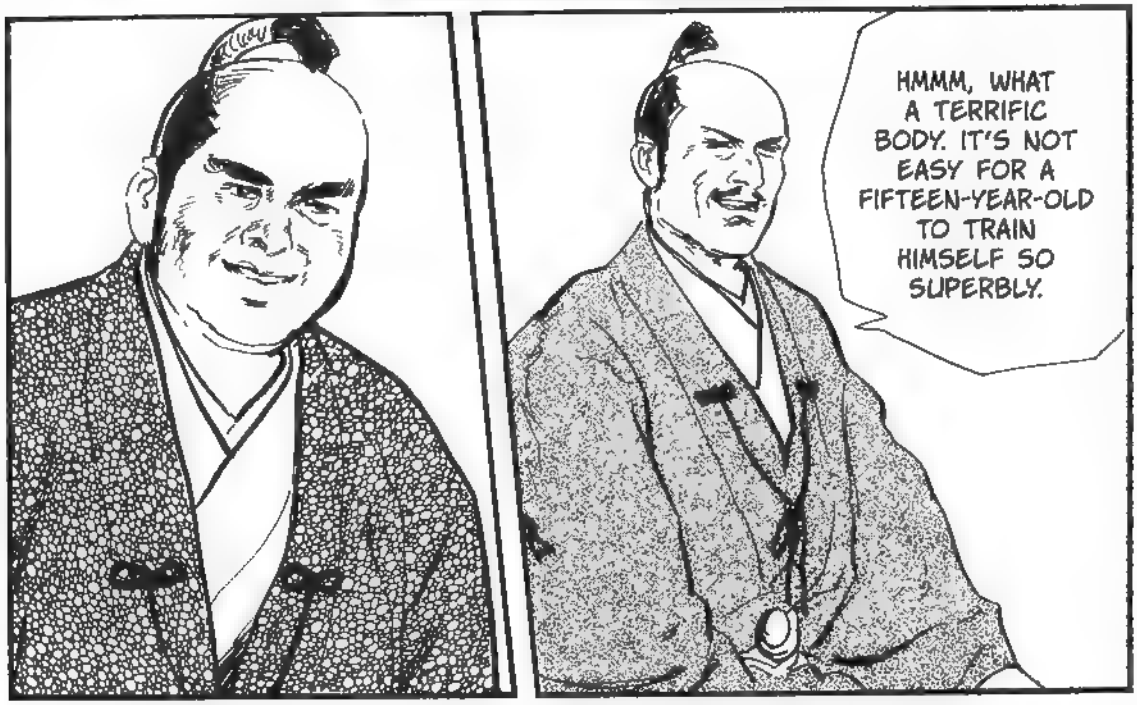



HA HA HA HA HA.
WHAT SUPERB SKILL, AS ALWAYS. I AM QUITE IMPRESSED.
EXCEL-LENT!
HA HA HA HA HA. CAN YOU PULL IT?
YES.
NOBUYASU, WANT TO TRY YOUR HAND?
YES.
LISTEN, EVEN IF YOU FAIL, YOU NEED NOT BE ASHAMED. MY BOW IS SO STRONG, IT REQUIRES THREE MEN TO STRING IT.
WITHOUT CONSIDERABLE STRENGTH, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO PULL.

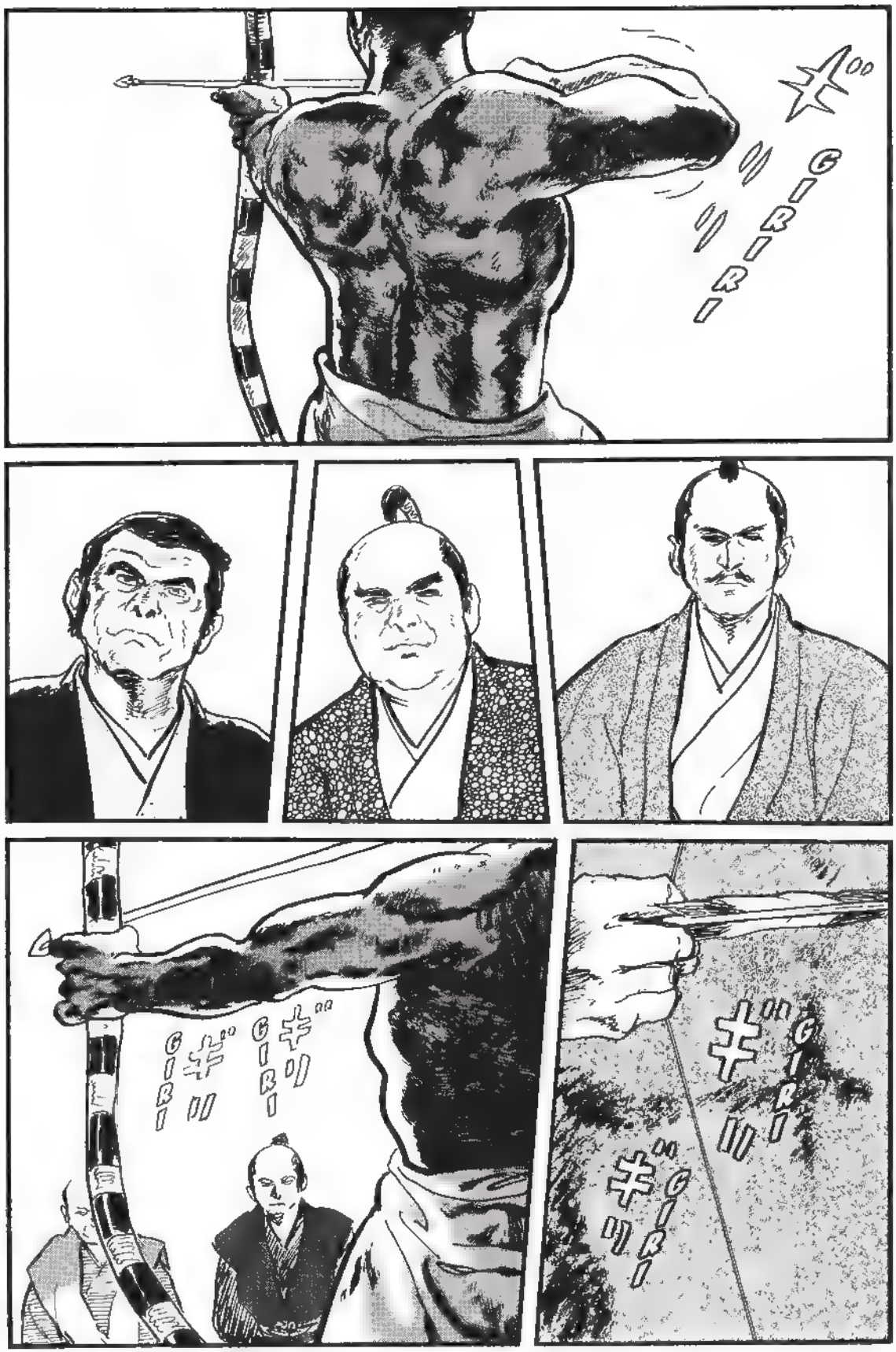

AT THAT MOMENT, SOMETHING OMINOUS CROSSED HANZŌ'S MIND. IT SPREAD LIKE RIPPLES ON THE SURFACE OF WATER. AND BECAUSE HE COULD NOT EXPLAIN IT, THE FEELING DISTURBED HIM EVEN MORE AND LEFT HIM UNEASY.


HIRAIWA CHIKAYOSHI, THE GUARDIAN OF NOBUYASU, FELT THE SAME WAY. WHAT IF NOBUYASU COULD PULL THIS EXCEPTIONALLY POWERFUL BOW THAT REQUIRED THREE MEN TO STRING? WHAT EFFECT WOULD THIS HAVE ON NOBUNAGA?
CHIKAYOSHI DID NOT EXPECT NOBUYASU TO MANAGE THE WEAPON. IN FACT, CHIKAYOSHI HOPED THAT NOBUYASU COULDN'T, NOT JUST DIDN'T. HE ALMOST FELT LIKE PRAYING THAT NOBUYASU COULDN'T.




HMMM, WHAT A TERRIFIC BODY. IT'S NOT EASY FOR A FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD TO TRAIN HIMSELF SO SUPERBLY.

AND NOW THE DARK THOUGHT WAS TOO BIG TO WIPE FROM HIS MIND.
WAS HE UNEASY BECAUSE NOBUYASU LOOKED SO MUCH LIKE IMAGAWA UJIZANE? HANZŌ ASKED HIMSELF THIS. BUT, NO, THAT WASN'T IT.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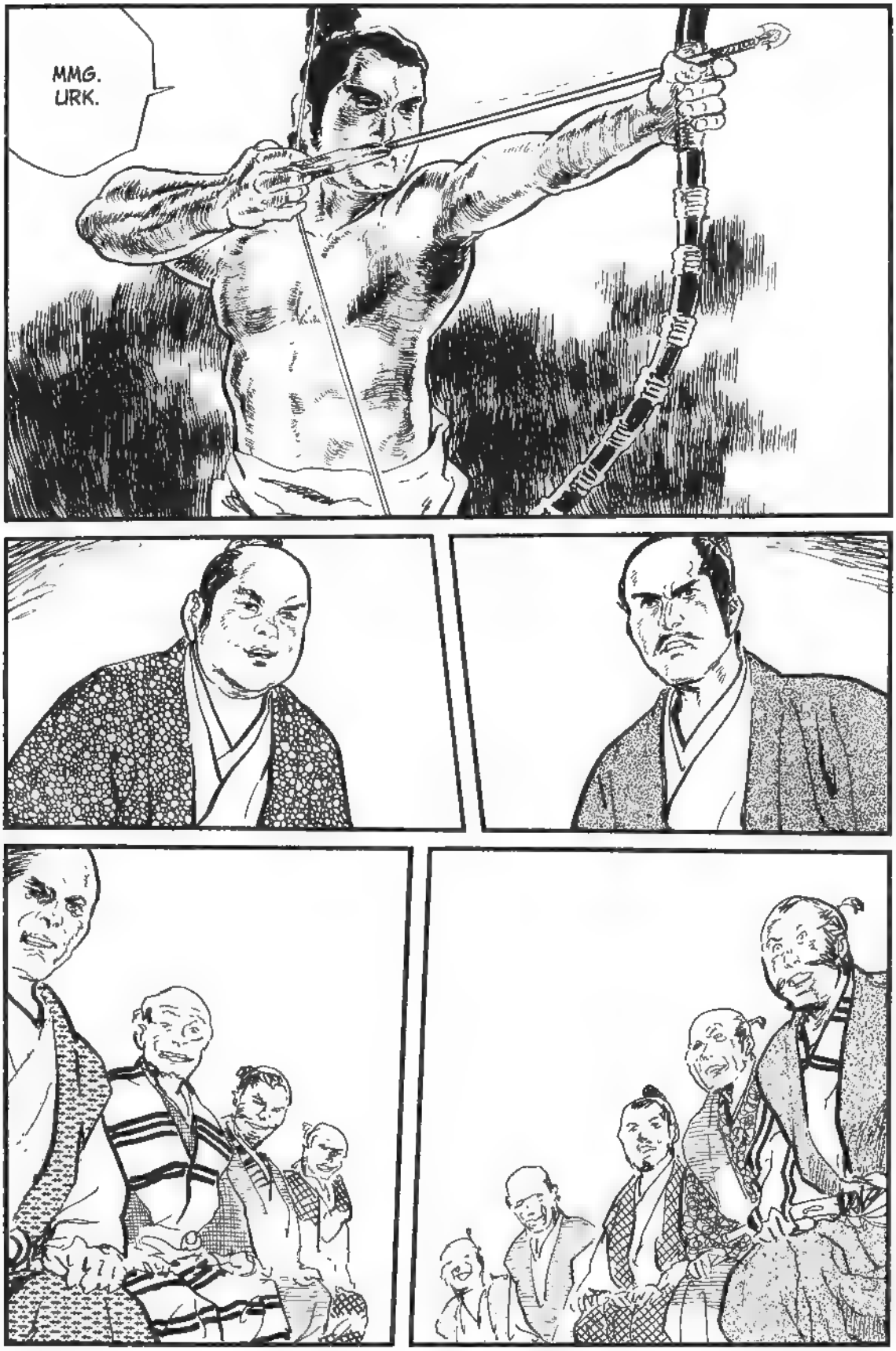
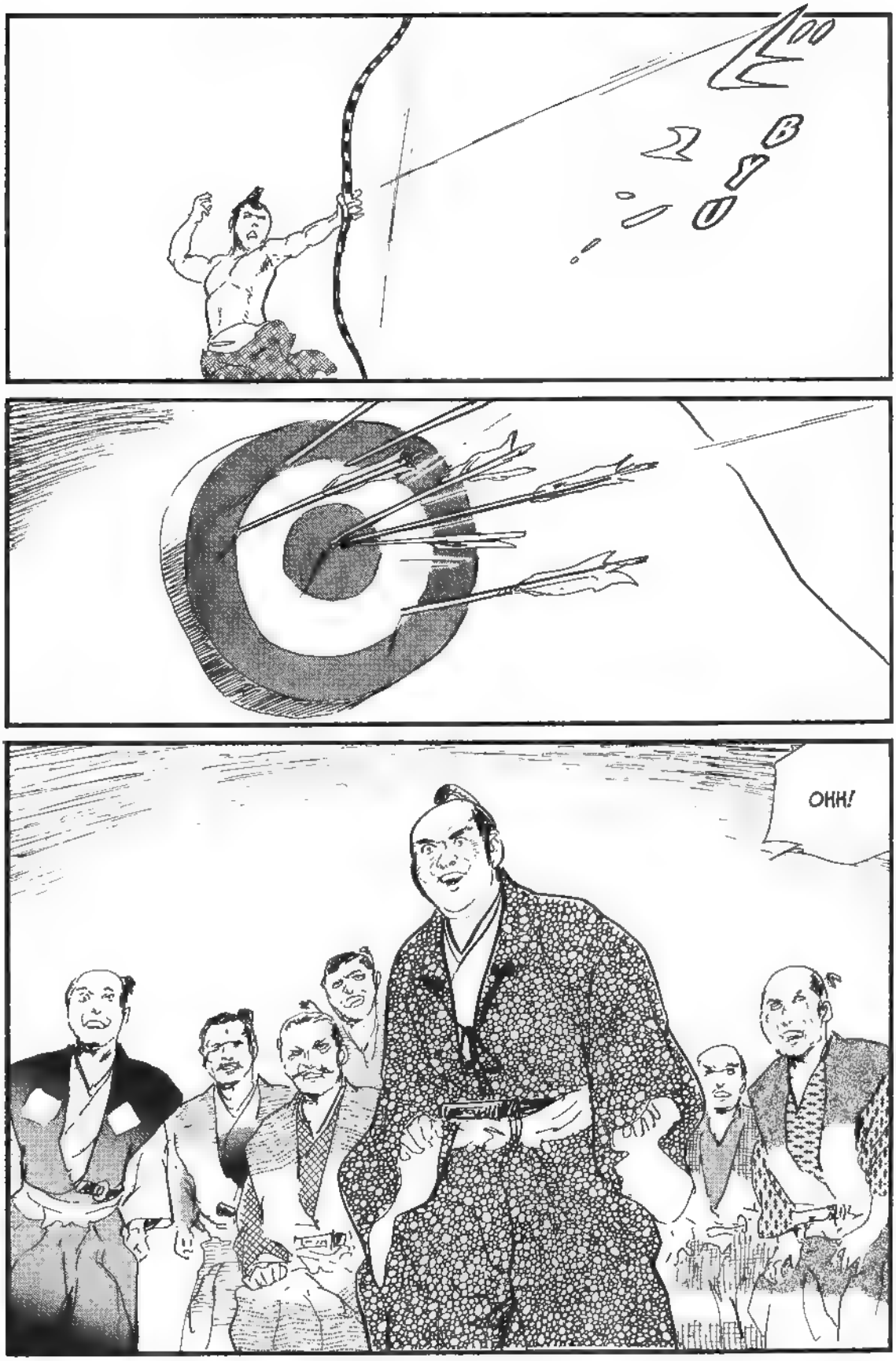
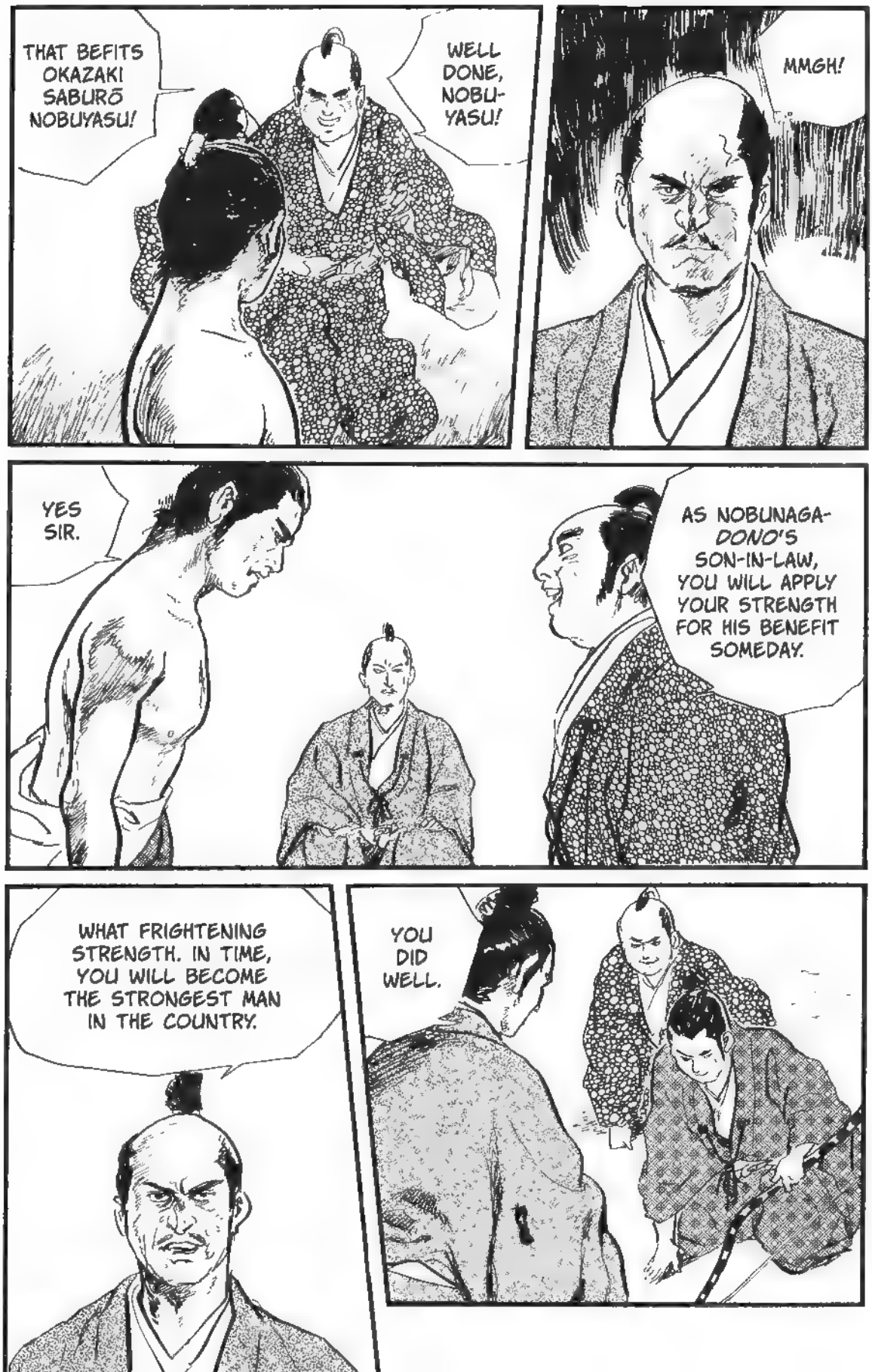
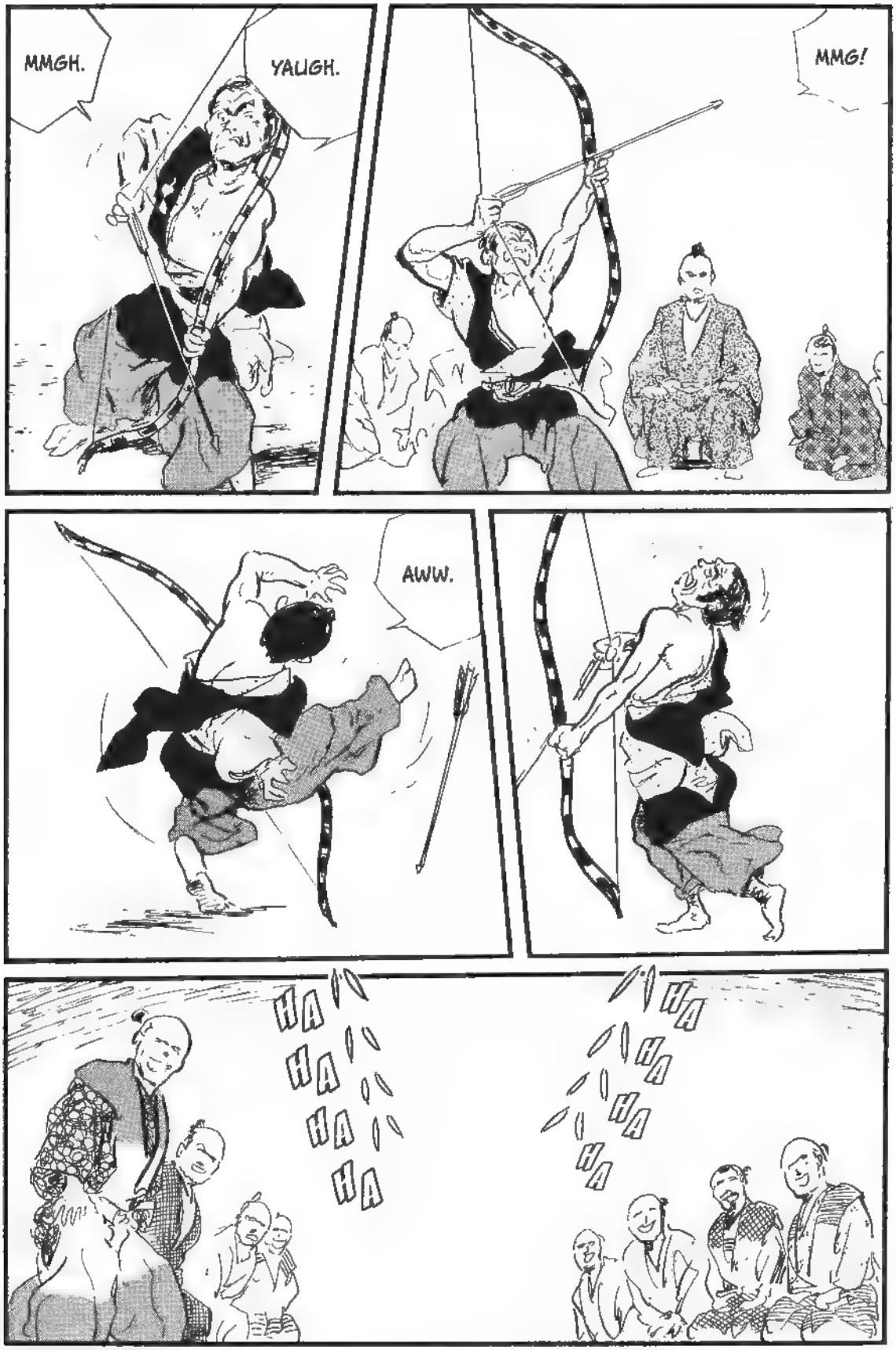

MMG.
URK.


OHH!


THAT BEFITS OKAZAKI SABURŌ NOBUYASU!
WELL DONE, NOBU-YASU!
MMGH!
YES SIR.
AS NOBUNAGA-*DONO*'S SON-IN-LAW, YOU WILL APPLY YOUR STRENGTH FOR HIS BENEFIT SOMEDAY.
WHAT FRIGHTENING STRENGTH. IN TIME, YOU WILL BECOME THE STRONGEST MAN IN THE COUNTRY.
YOU DID WELL.

AHA HA HA.
AHA HA HA HA HA. HE CAN'T BE IEYASU-DONO'S SON WITH THAT KIND OF MUSCLE.
HMPH. NOBUYASU COULD BE UJIZANE'S SON. IT'S NOT IMPOSSIBLE INDEED. HMMM.
LET ME TRY MY HAND, TOO.


MMGH.
YAUGH.
MMG!
AWW.
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
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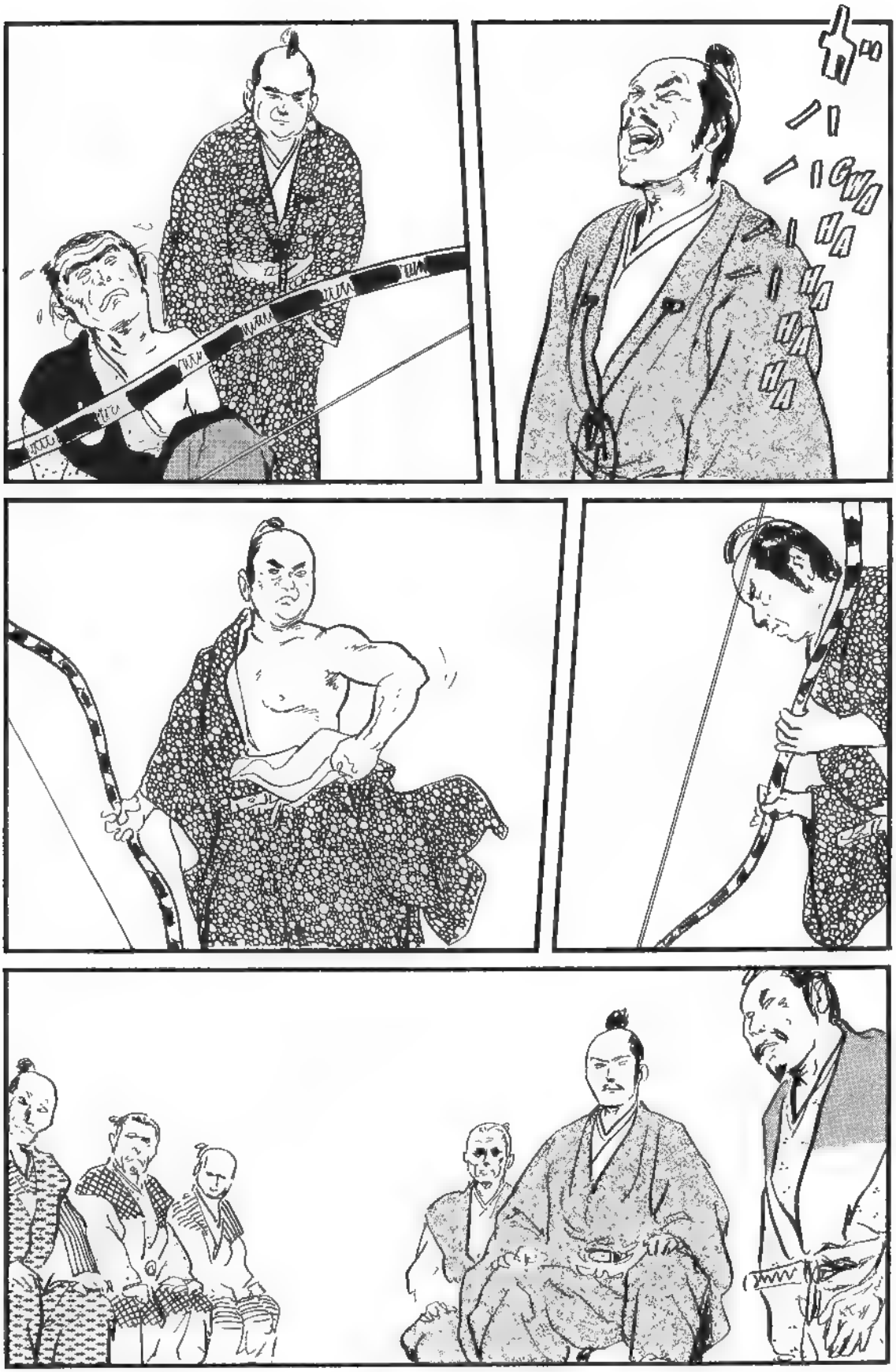
HA
HA
HA


ハハハハハハ

URRGH!
む
MMMGH
う
URRR!
FWIP

AS...AS YOU SEE, NOBUYASU IS OF MY BLOOD!!
IT'S QUITE POS-SIBLE...
MILORD... IT WAS EXCELLENT.

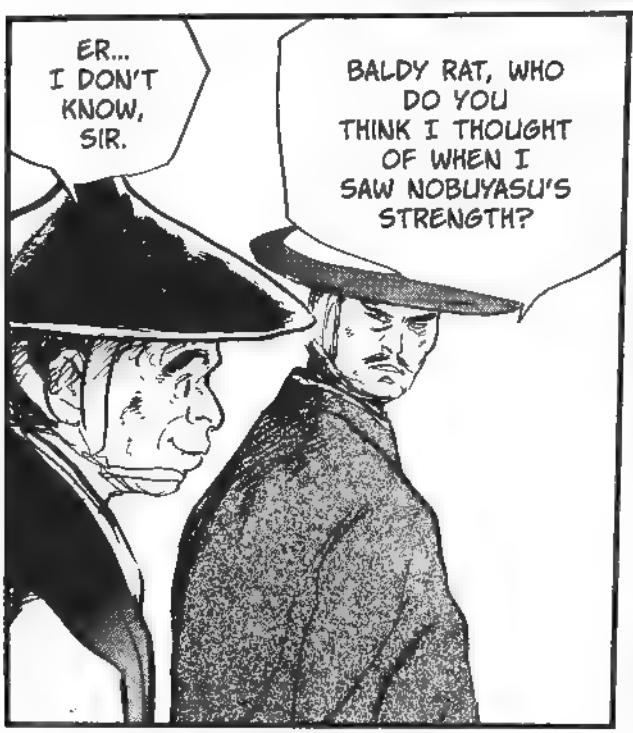
GOTOKU, ENJOY NOBUYASU'S COMPANY. I WANT TO SEE MY GRANDCHILD SOON.

FATHER!
PLEASE TRAVEL SAFELY.
IT'S NOTHING.
WHAT IS IT?
ALL RIGHT.

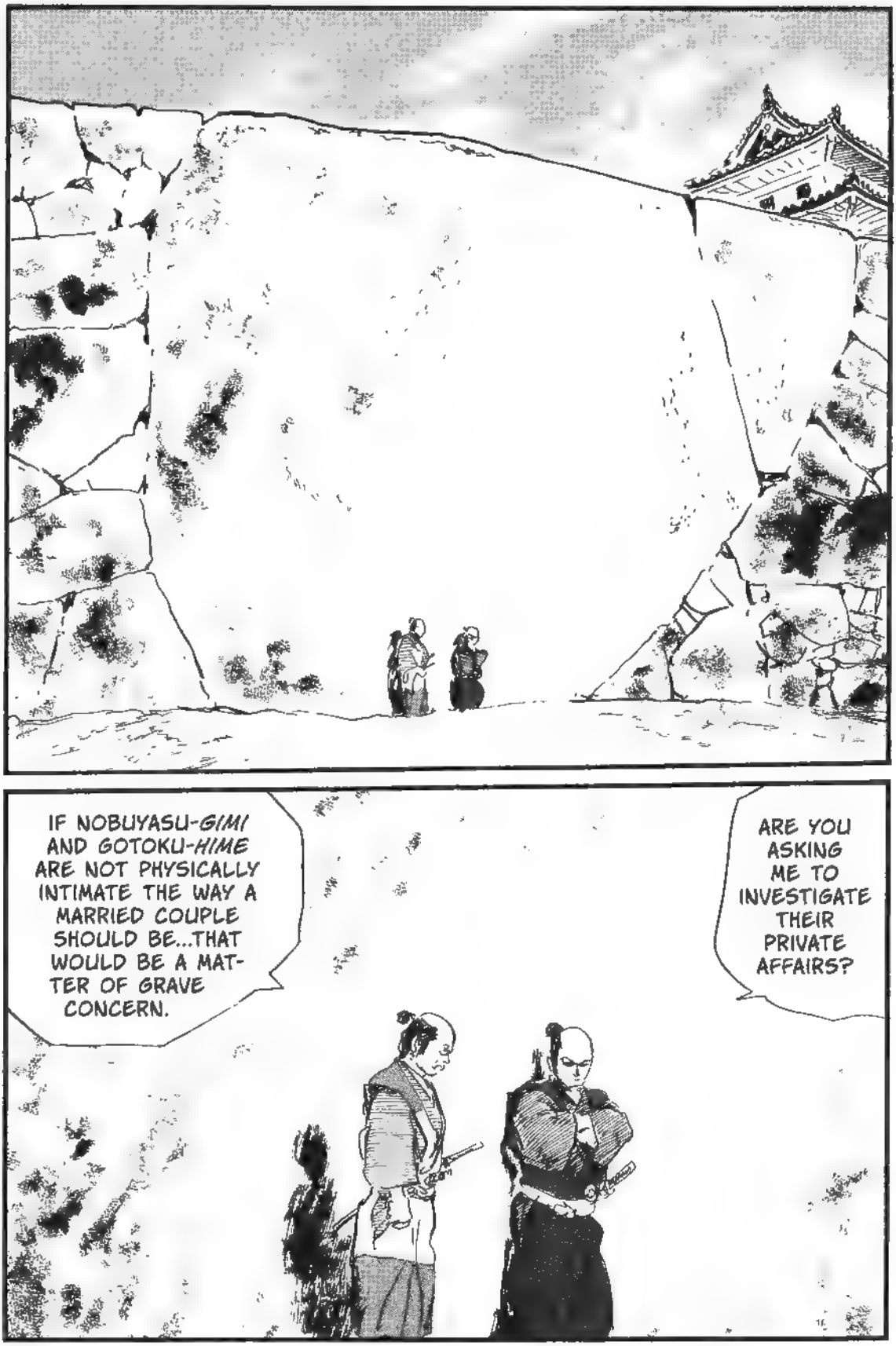
IEYASU DOESN'T NEED A SON AS STRONG AS THAT BOY.

IF HE WAS A VASSAL, THAT WOULD BE ONE THING. BUT HE IS TO LEAD THE CLAN.

EVEN THE GRANDFATHER OF IEYASU, WHOSE VALOR WAS HIGHLY CELEBRATED, WAS SMALL AND WEAKISH--ALTHOUGH HE WAS EXCELLENT WHEN HE WENT TO WAR.
THERE'S NO ONE IN THE MATSUDAIRA BLOODLINE WHOSE STRENGTH IS AS NOTABLE AS THAT.

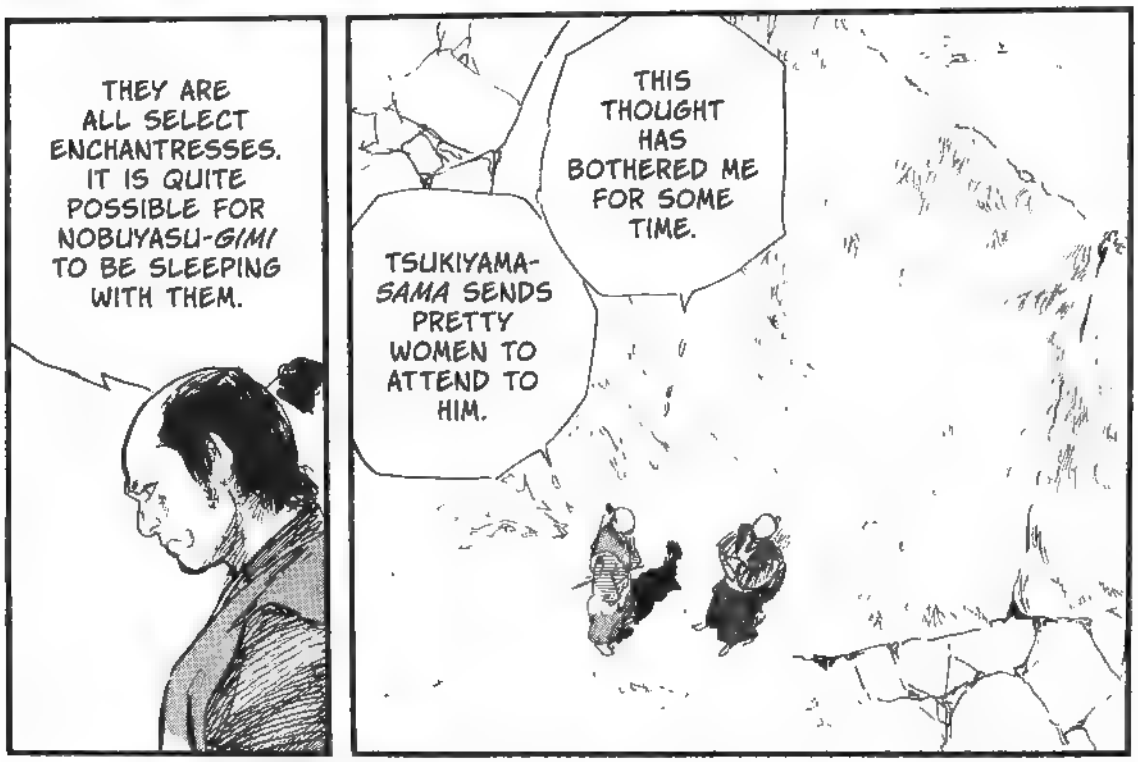

ER... I DON'T KNOW, SIR.
BALDY RAT, WHO DO YOU THINK I THOUGHT OF WHEN I SAW NOBUYASU'S STRENGTH?

URR...
IMAGAWA YOSHIMOTO, THAT IS.
A MAN WHO WAS SAID TO POSSESS THE STRENGTH OF TEN MEN, WHO CARRIED A GREAT SWORD WHICH THREE MEN PUT TOGETHER COULD NOT EASILY HEFT, AND WHO USED A BOW THAT REQUIRED FIVE MEN TO STRING.
IN TIME...
IMAGAWA'S BLOOD RUNS THICK IN TOKUGAWA, BALDY RAT!
WE'LL SEE IN TIME.


IF NOBUYASU-GIMI AND GOTOKU-HIME ARE NOT PHYSICALLY INTIMATE THE WAY A MARRIED COUPLE SHOULD BE...THAT WOULD BE A MATTER OF GRAVE CONCERN.
ARE YOU ASKING ME TO INVESTIGATE THEIR PRIVATE AFFAIRS?

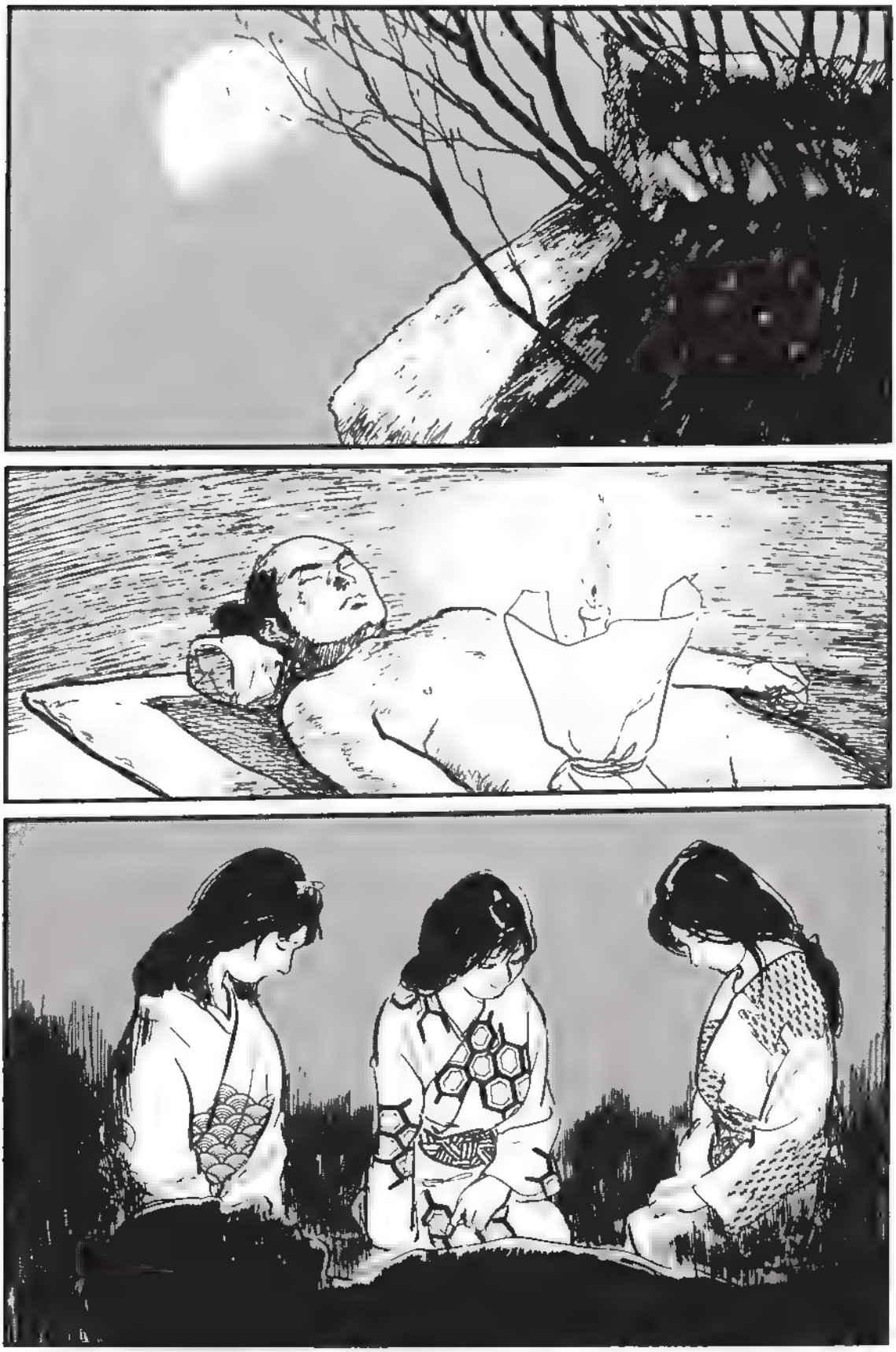
NOBUYASU-GIMI HAS SUCH A FINELY BUILT BODY... IF THEY SHARE A SLEEPING CHAMBER, HE WOULD DEFINITELY WANT TO HAVE INTERCOURSE WITH HER.

BUT IF THEY HAVEN'T HAD SEX, CHANCES ARE HE SHARES HIS SLEEPING QUARTERS WITH OTHER WOMEN.


THEY ARE ALL SELECT ENCHANTRESSES. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE FOR NOBUYASU-GIMI TO BE SLEEPING WITH THEM.
TSUKIYAMA-SAMA SENDS PRETTY WOMEN TO ATTEND TO HIM.
THIS THOUGHT HAS BOTHERED ME FOR SOME TIME.

I MAY STILL BE HIS GUARDIAN, BUT ONLY IN NAME NOWADAYS. ONCE NIGHT FALLS, I CANNOT INTERFERE WITH DOMESTIC MATTERS.
NOBUNAGA-SAMA WILL HEAR ABOUT IT SOONER OR LATER.
HANZŌ-DONO, IF TSUKIYAMA-SAMA IS INTENTION-ALLY BLOCKING NOBUYASU-GIMI FROM HAVING THE GIRL...
PLEASE LOOK INTO THIS, HANZŌ-DONO.
MMG.
MAYBE GOTOKU-HIME-SAMA WANTED TO TELL HIM ABOUT IT THIS MORNING.

AS HIS VASSAL...I CAN'T DO WHAT YOU ASK.
WE MUST FIND THE TRUTH AND TAKE ACTION. OTHERWISE, IT MAY LEAD TO THE DEMISE OF OUR CLAN.
OF COURSE YOU CAN'T.
I CAN'T ARGUE WITH THAT...
YES.
LET'S COME UP WITH ANOTHER WAY.



TSUKIBUE, WHAT'S THE MATTER?
NOW COME TO ME, TSUKUMO.
AFTER I'VE MADE THINGS SO CLEAR, YOU STILL CAN'T DO WHAT I ASK?

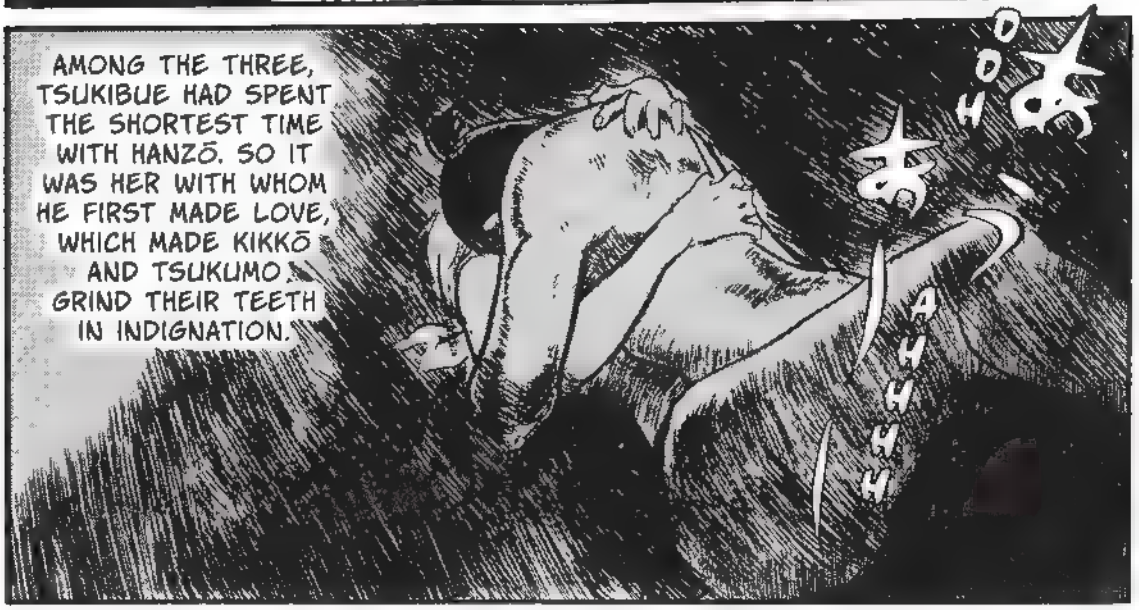
HURRY UP AND DO IT!
BLIND-FOLD YOUR-SELVES.

AH...

HAA...
OH.
IN HANZŌ'S HOUSE OF IGA, THE HEARTS OF ONE MAN AND THREE WOMEN WERE AT WAR. THE MAN DEMANDED THAT THE WOMEN BECOME ONE AND SLEEP WITH HIM AS ONE. BUT THE WOMEN REJECTED THIS AS SOMETHING BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF COMMON SENSE.

AH!
AAHHH
AAHHH
JUST LIKE THE MAN, THE THREE WOMEN WERE *SUPPA* AND COULD SEE IN THE DARK. THAT'S WHY HE ASKED THEM TO BLINDFOLD THEMSELVES BEFORE HE MADE LOVE TO ONE OF THEM.
BY WOUNDING THE PRIDE OF THE REMAINING TWO, HE WANTED TO AROUSE CONFLICT IN THEIR HEARTS AND THUS ACHIEVE HIS GOAL.

AHHHH


AMONG THE THREE, TSUKIBUE HAD SPENT THE SHORTEST TIME WITH HANZŌ. SO IT WAS HER WITH WHOM HE FIRST MADE LOVE, WHICH MADE KIKKŌ AND TSUKUMO GRIND THEIR TEETH IN INDIGNATION.
OOH
AHHHHH

AHHH!!
AHHHH
AHHHHHHH
BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT SEE, THEY BECAME EVEN MORE IRATE, AND THEIR EXASPERATION CONSUMED THEIR BODIES.
AHHHH
AHHH

AT FIRST, OUT OF CONSIDERATION FOR KIKKŌ AND TSUKUMO, TSUKIBUE TRIED TO BE QUIET. YET SHE FELT SUPERIOR THAT HANZŌ HAD CHOSEN HER FIRST. THEN CAME THE FIRST WAVE OF ORGASM, AND ALONG WITH IT, HER SENSE OF SUPERIORITY SWELLED WITHIN HER. IN THE END, SHE SIMPLY COULD NOT HELP BUT CRY OUT WITHOUT ANY RESERVATION.
AHHHH

YA
GE
GRRR
RRR

AH!!

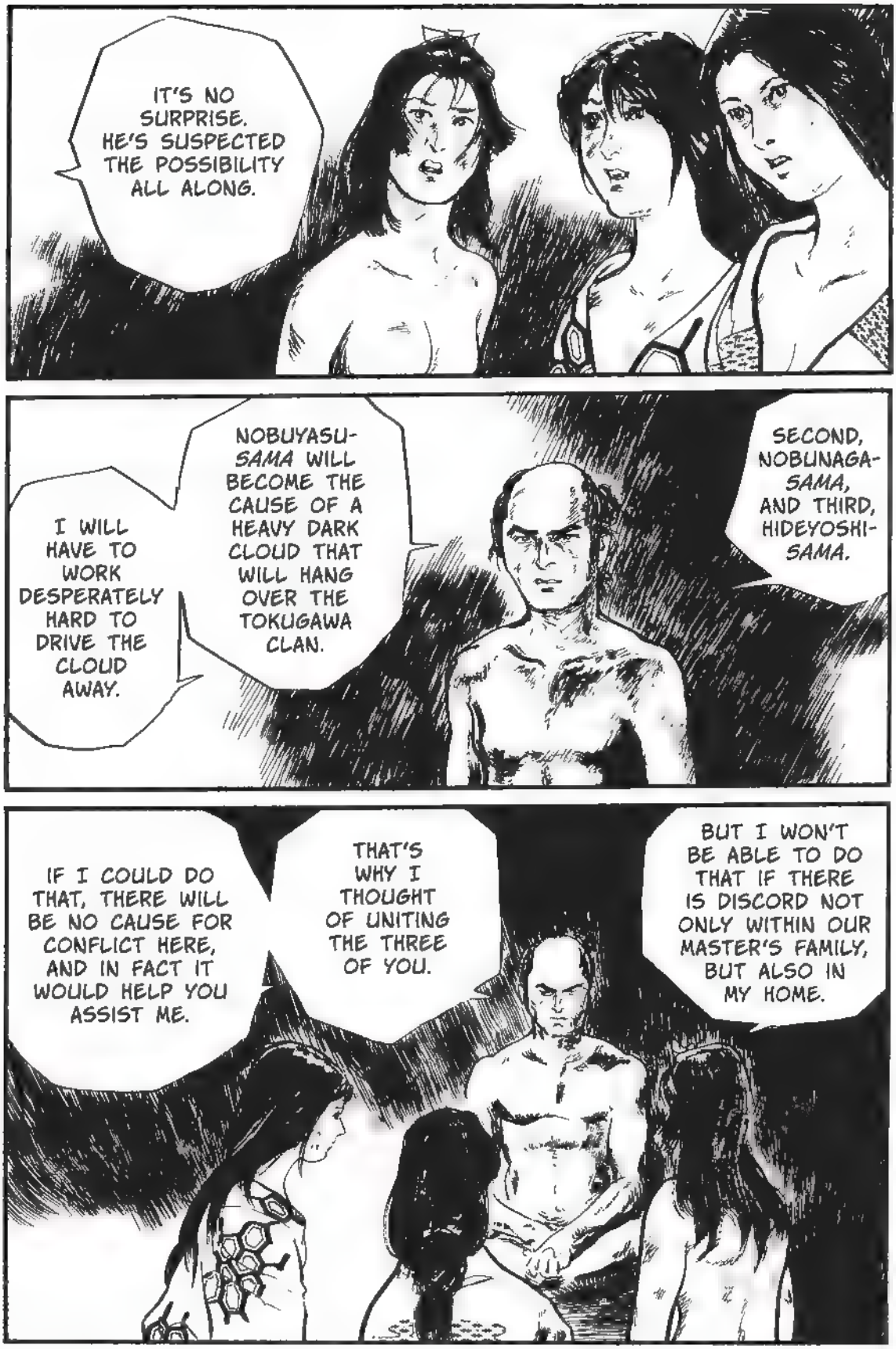
HAIEE
HAIEE

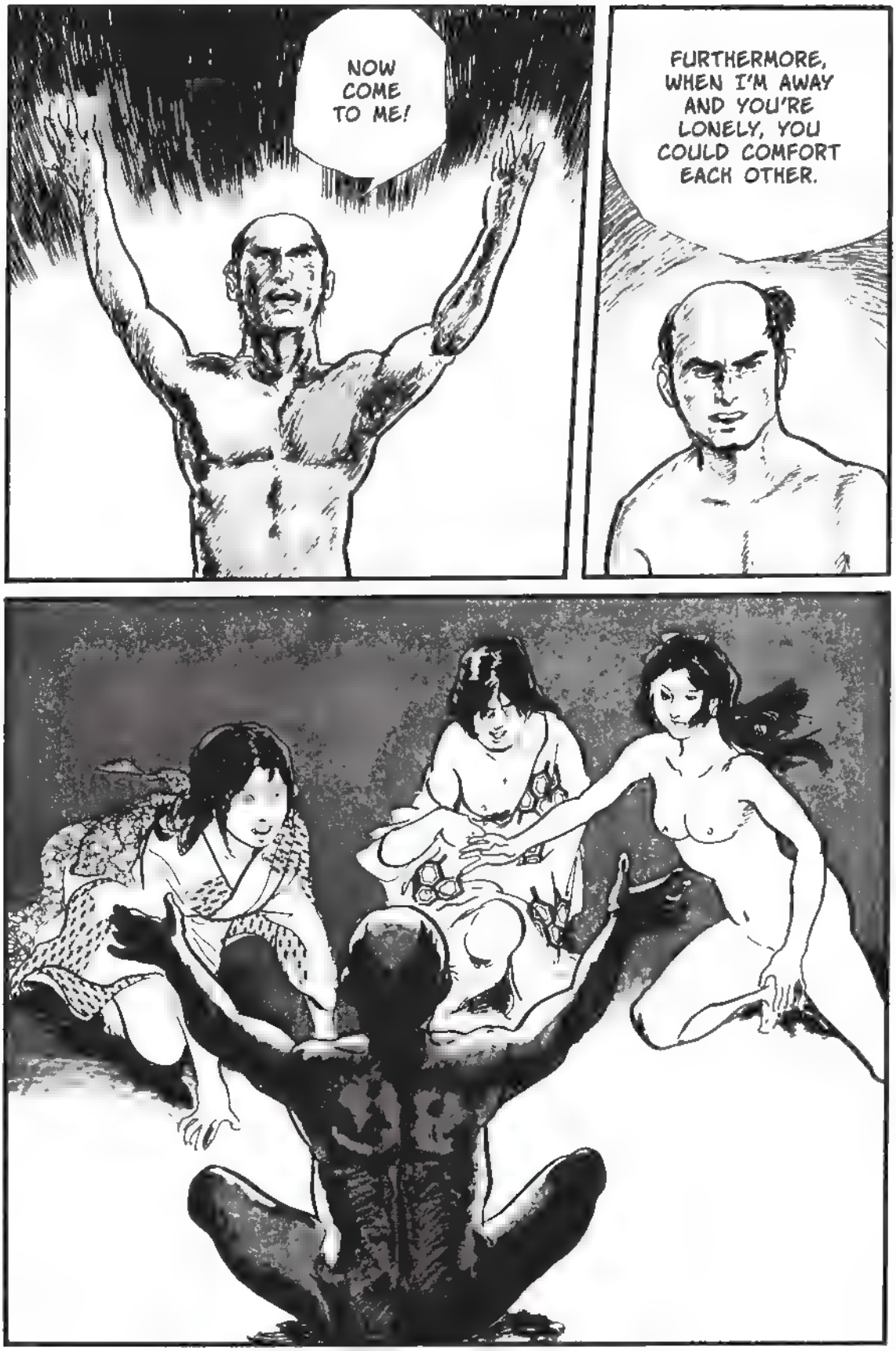
SPAK!
THOK!
IF YOU HATE SO MUCH, THEN KILL EACH OTHER.
CHOK!

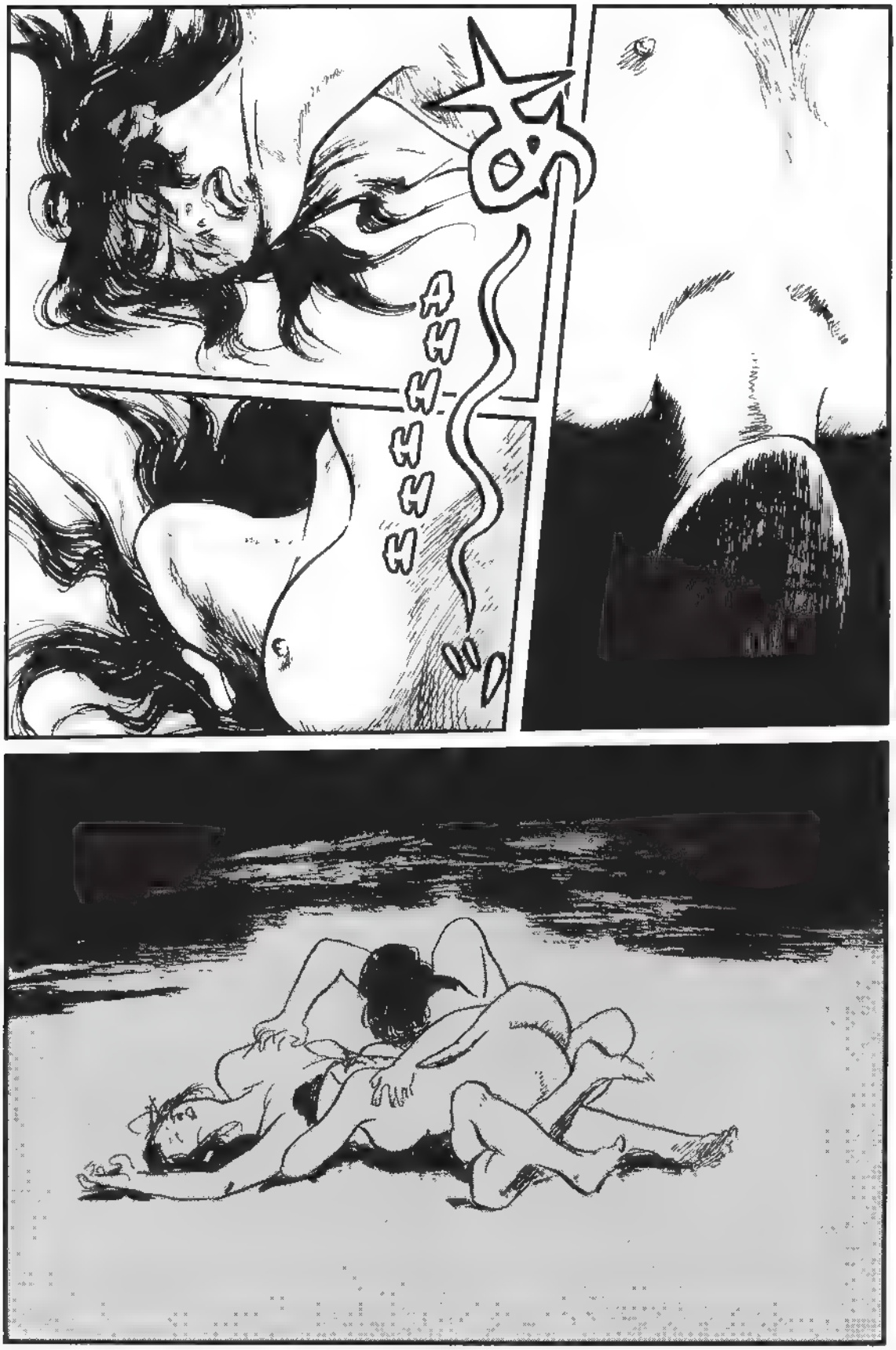
BRAWLING WILL NOT BRING YOU CLOSURE.
THERE WILL BE NOTHING BUT DEATH AT THE END OF THIS FIGHT.

SO?
IF YOU START KILLING EACH OTHER, YOU KNOW YOU MUST KILL ME TOO BEFORE IT'S OVER.
I KNOW YOU CAN'T KILL EACH OTHER. YOU'RE ALL MY WIVES, WHOM I LOVE.
IF YOU WON'T KILL EACH OTHER, STOP FIGHTING.

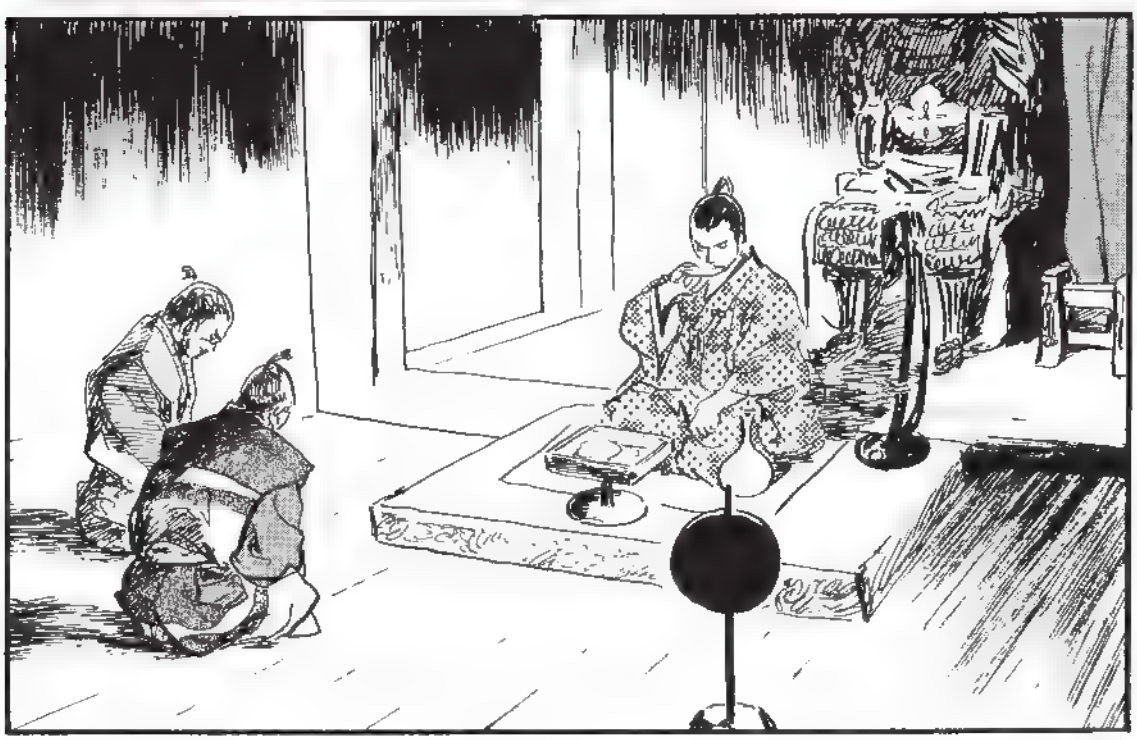
HE IS UJIZANE'S.
NOBUYASU-SAMA IS NOT IEYASU-SAMA'S SON.
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE IT WAS A FRUITLESS EFFORT.
I KEPT MY PROMISE WITH TSUKIYAMA-SAMA AND NEVER SAID A WORD ABOUT IT UNTIL TODAY.
I WAS THE ONLY PERSON WHO SAW AND KNEW THIS.
FIRST, IEYASU-SAMA.
THREE MEN REALIZED THE TRUTH UPON WATCHING NOBUYASU-SAMA PULL THAT POWERFUL BOW.


IT'S NO SURPRISE. HE'S SUSPECTED THE POSSIBILITY ALL ALONG.
SECOND, NOBUNAGA-SAMA, AND THIRD, HIDEYOSHI-SAMA.
NOBUYASU-SAMA WILL BECOME THE CAUSE OF A HEAVY DARK CLOUD THAT WILL HANG OVER THE TOKUGAWA CLAN.
I WILL HAVE TO WORK DESPERATELY HARD TO DRIVE THE CLOUD AWAY.
BUT I WON'T BE ABLE TO DO THAT IF THERE IS DISCORD NOT ONLY WITHIN OUR MASTER'S FAMILY, BUT ALSO IN MY HOME.
THAT'S WHY I THOUGHT OF UNITING THE THREE OF YOU.
IF I COULD DO THAT, THERE WILL BE NO CAUSE FOR CONFLICT HERE, AND IN FACT IT WOULD HELP YOU ASSIST ME.


NOW COME TO ME!
FURTHERMORE, WHEN I'M AWAY AND YOU'RE LONELY, YOU COULD COMFORT EACH OTHER.


AHHHHH

KOFUCHU, KAI



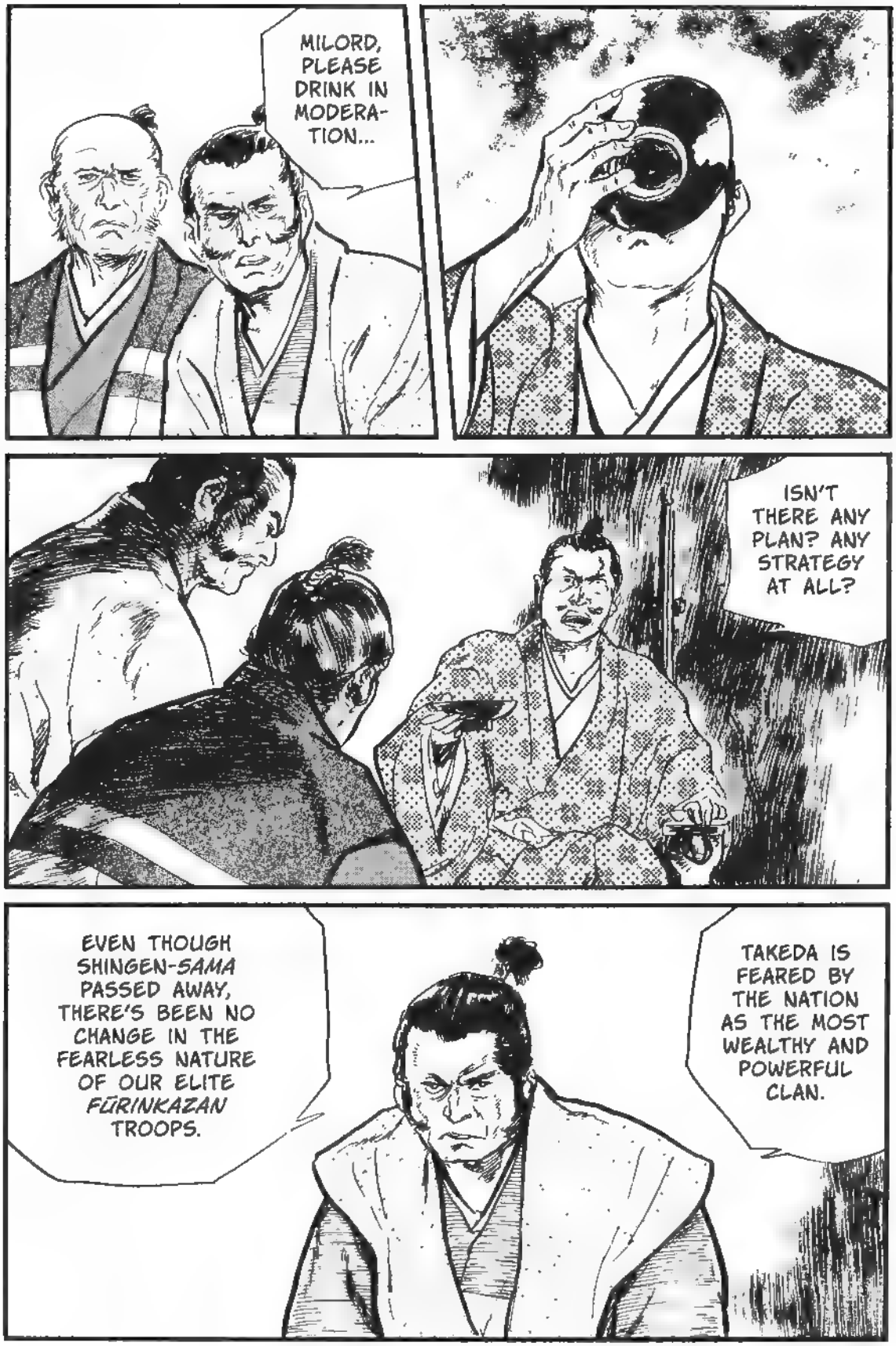
疾如風
徐如林
侵掠如火
不動如山
SHUP

THE WAY THINGS STAND...

...PEOPLE WILL CALL ME AN UNWORTHY SON AND A FEEBLE-MINDED WARLORD.
IF I DON'T DO ANY-THING...

"WHEN SHINGEN DIED, HIS SON, KATSUYORI, DID NOT MARCH ON KYOTO. NOT ONLY THAT, HE'S HELPLESS AGAINST THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE." THAT'S HOW THEY'LL SLANDER ME!!

IF THAT WAS ALL THERE WAS TO IT, THAT WOULD BE ONE THING. BUT TO HAVE HIS WILL DIVULGED! TO LET EVERYONE KNOW THAT I'M TO MOURN AND DO NOTHING FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS! I AM LOST FOR WORDS!
"SHINGEN ATTEMPTED TO MARCH HIS ARMY TO THE CENTER, BUT KATSUYORI FOLDED THEIR FLAG AND REFUSED TO LEAVE KAI."
TO TOP IT OFF, MY FATHER'S DEATH IS NOW KNOWN ALL OVER THE COUNTRY.
IT'S LIKE SHOUTING IT EVERYWHERE THAT THERE IS NO ONE IN KAI, NO ONE AT ALL!


MILORD, PLEASE DRINK IN MODERA-TION...
ISN'T THERE ANY PLAN? ANY STRATEGY AT ALL?
EVEN THOUGH SHINGEN-*SAMA* PASSED AWAY, THERE'S BEEN NO CHANGE IN THE FEARLESS NATURE OF OUR ELITE *FŪRINKAZAN* TROOPS.
TAKEDA IS FEARED BY THE NATION AS THE MOST WEALTHY AND POWERFUL CLAN.

BUT IT'S TOO SLACK!!
KRAK
THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO STORM IN, AND THEREFORE IT IS TRULY ADVISABLE TO STAY PUT AND MAINTAIN OUR FIGHTING FORCE UNTIL THE TIME IS RIPE...
ONCE THAT HAPPENS, EVEN TAKEDA WILL NOT STAND A CHANCE!
THE TIME WILL NEVER COME! IF WE DO NOTHING, ODA-TOKUGAWA WILL GROW MORE POWERFUL AND NOBUNAGA MAY GAIN TOTAL CONTROL OF THE COUNTRY!
NOW IS OUR CHANCE! WE MUST DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!
RIGHT NOW WE ARE STILL EVENLY MATCHED!
ALL WE'VE LOST IS MY FATHER. ONE MAN ALONE!

GET OUTTA HERE!
ARRGH! GET OUT!
I DON'T WANT TO LOOK AT PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO USEFUL IDEAS WHAT-SOEVER!

DAMMIT...
BEFORE LONG, ODA-TOKUGAWA WILL OVERWHELM EVERYONE, AND TAKEDA WILL BE FORCED TO ITS DOWNFALL...

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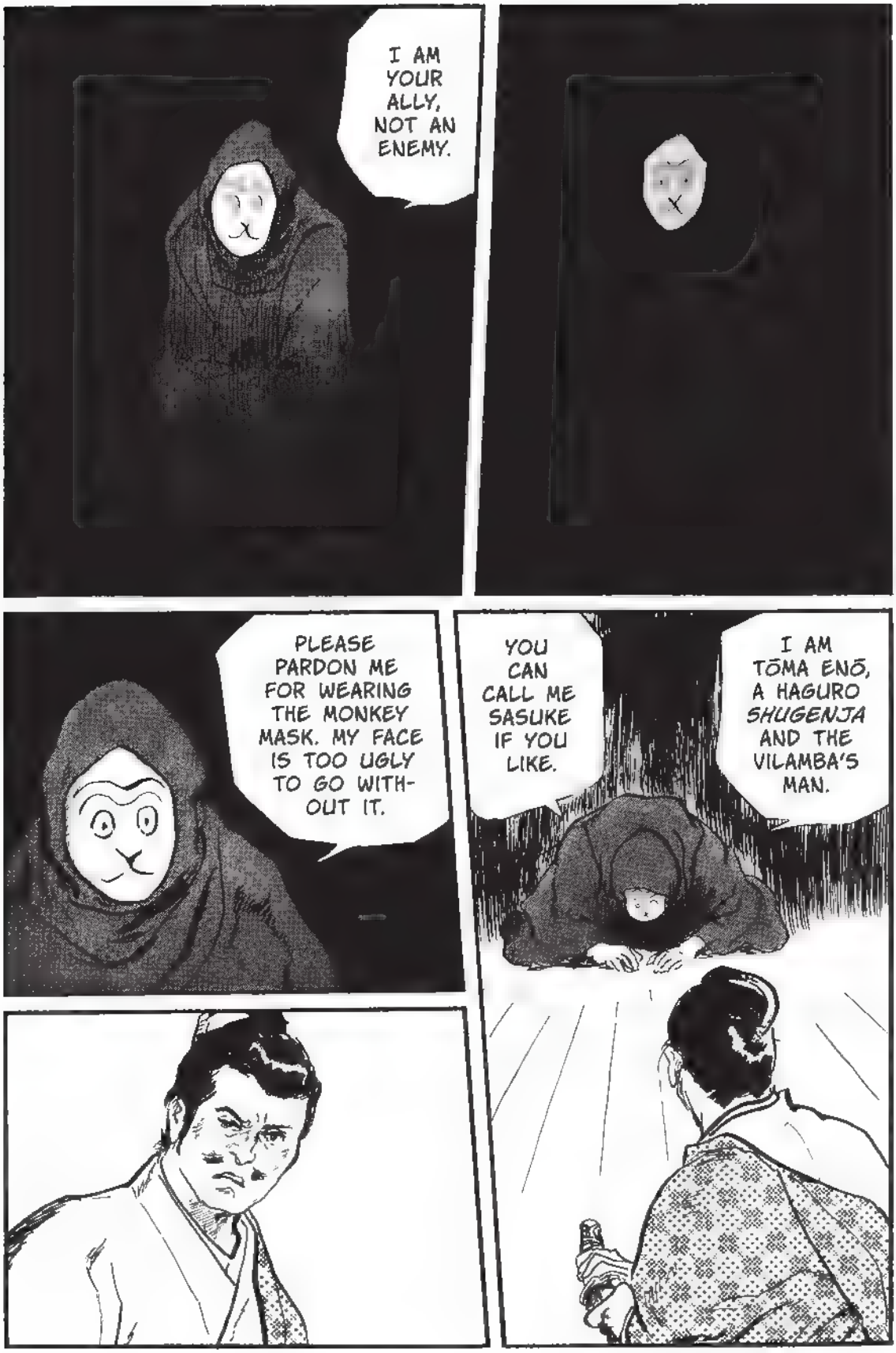
まままゆ
しゃべりたい
しゃべりて
しゃべりたい
しゃみゃ

ANYE
MANYE
MAMANE
SHAHITAI!
SHAHITE
HAETE
SHAHITAI
SHAME

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!


I AM YOUR ALLY, NOT AN ENEMY.
PLEASE PARDON ME FOR WEARING THE MONKEY MASK. MY FACE IS TOO UGLY TO GO WITHOUT IT.
YOU CAN CALL ME SASUKE IF YOU LIKE.
I AM TŌMA ENŌ, A HAGURO *SHUGENJA* AND THE VILAMBA'S MAN.

IMAGAWA'S BLOOD FLOWS IN LADY TSUKIYAMA, THE WIFE OF TOKUGAWA IEYASU. AND IN HER SON, NOBUYASU, IS ALSO IMAGAWA'S BLOOD.
WHAT DO YOU WANT?!
INDEED.
ARE YOU A SUPPA?
IEYASU AND TSUKIYAMA NO LONGER SLEEP TOGETHER AS HUSBAND AND WIFE.
MMM.
HE LOOKS VERY MUCH LIKE UJIZANE-DONO.
NOBUYASU AND GOTOKU DO NOT SLEEP TOGETHER LIKE HUSBAND AND WIFE, EITHER. THIS IS BECAUSE TSUKIYAMA SUPPLIES OTHER WOMEN TO NOBUYASU, REFUSING TO ALLOW THE BLOOD OF ODA AND IMAGAWA TO MIX.
TSUKIYAMA'S FIERY DESIRES ARE ABOUT TO EXPLODE AND CONSUME HER.

I AM WILLING TO WIN TSUKIYAMA'S HEART, QUELL HER BLAZING LUST, AND DELIVER YOUR LETTER TO HER.
HMM.

SO WHAT IF I BRING HER AROUND? EVEN IF I CAN MAKE HER AND NOBUYASU TURN TRAITOR, IT WON'T BE ENOUGH TO DAMAGE ODA-TOKUGAWA.
ARE YOU TELLING ME TO BRING LADY TSUKIYAMA TO OUR SIDE?

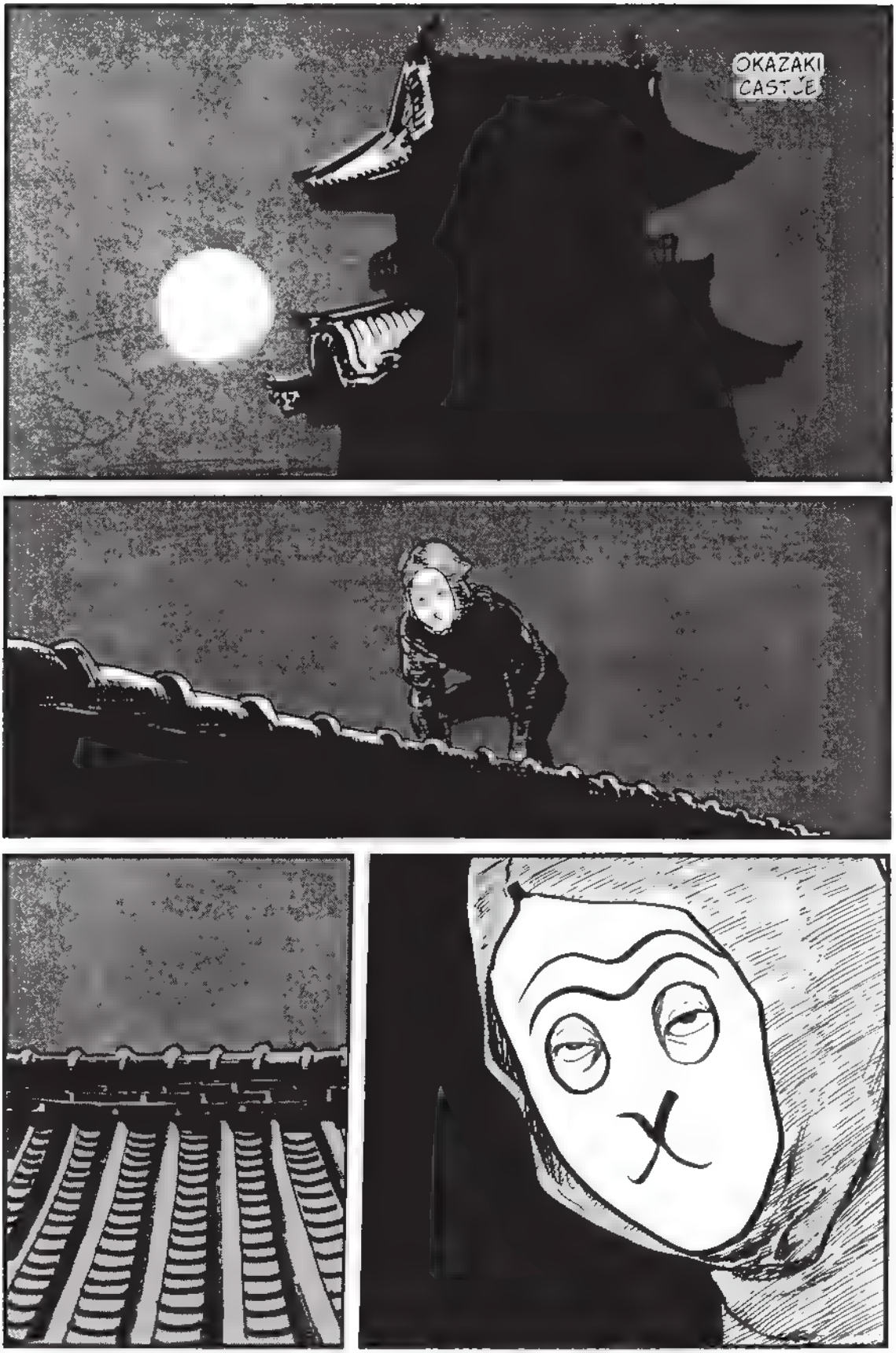
GOTOKU-*HIME* WILL INFORM NOBUNAGA. IT'S A MATTER OF COURSE.
OH.

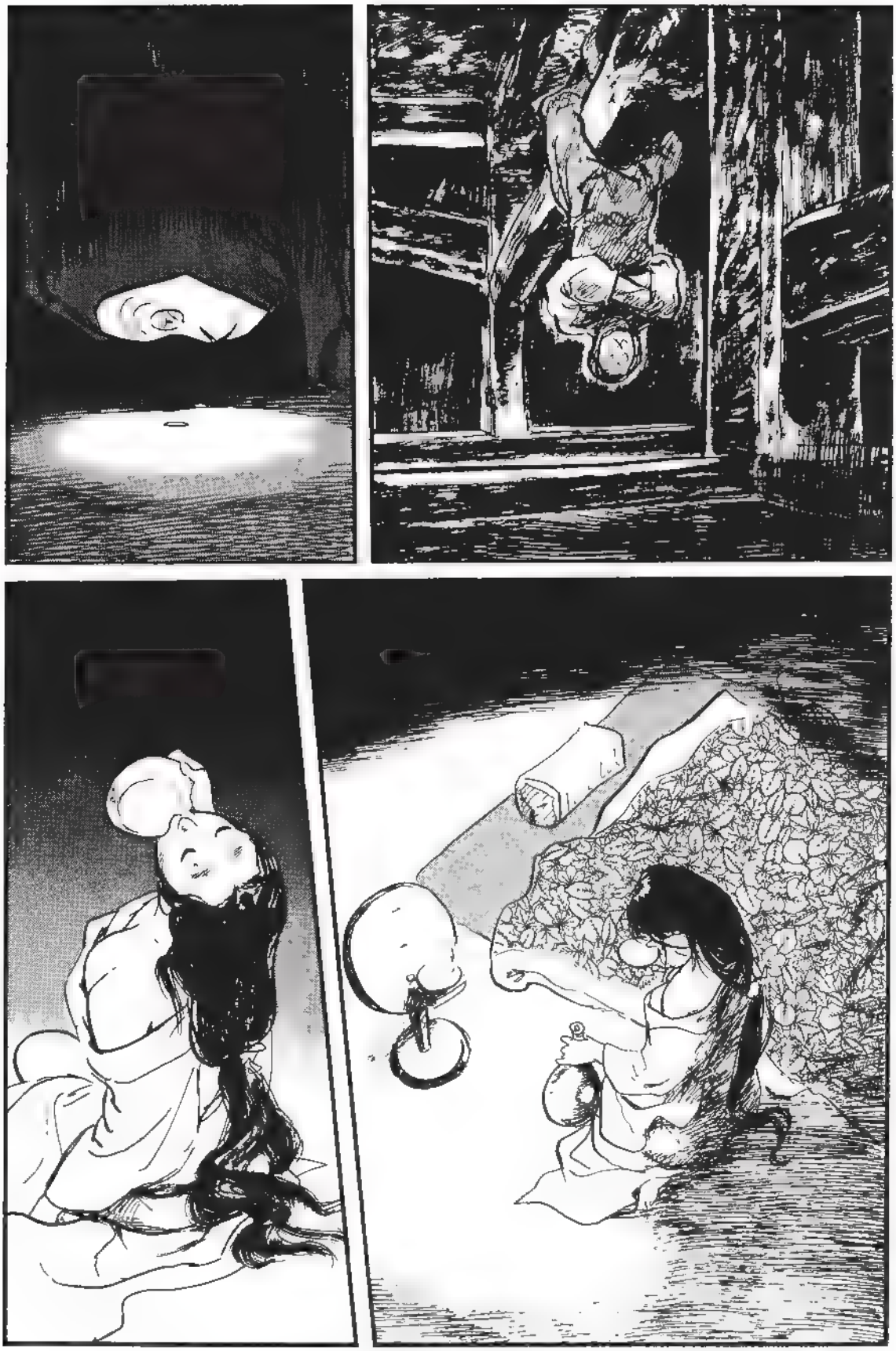
WE'LL DROP SUBTLE HINTS TO GOTOKU-*HIME* ABOUT TSUKIYAMA CONSPIRING WITH YOU.

ENRAGED, NOBUNAGA WILL DEMAND THAT IEYASU PUNISH BOTH TSUKIYAMA AND NOBUYASU.
SLAP
WHAT WARLORD WOULD KILL HIS WIFE AND SON JUST BECAUSE HE'S TOLD TO DO SO?
EVEN IF RUMORS ARE RAMPANT, NOBUYASU IS HIS SON, AND TSUKIYAMA IS HIS WIFE.
WILL IEYASU REFUSE?
INTERESTING. IF IEYASU ACCEPTS AND OBEYS NOBUNAGA'S ORDER...
HMMM.
THERE IS NO CASE IN HISTORY TO EVEN SUGGEST THE POSSIBILITY.

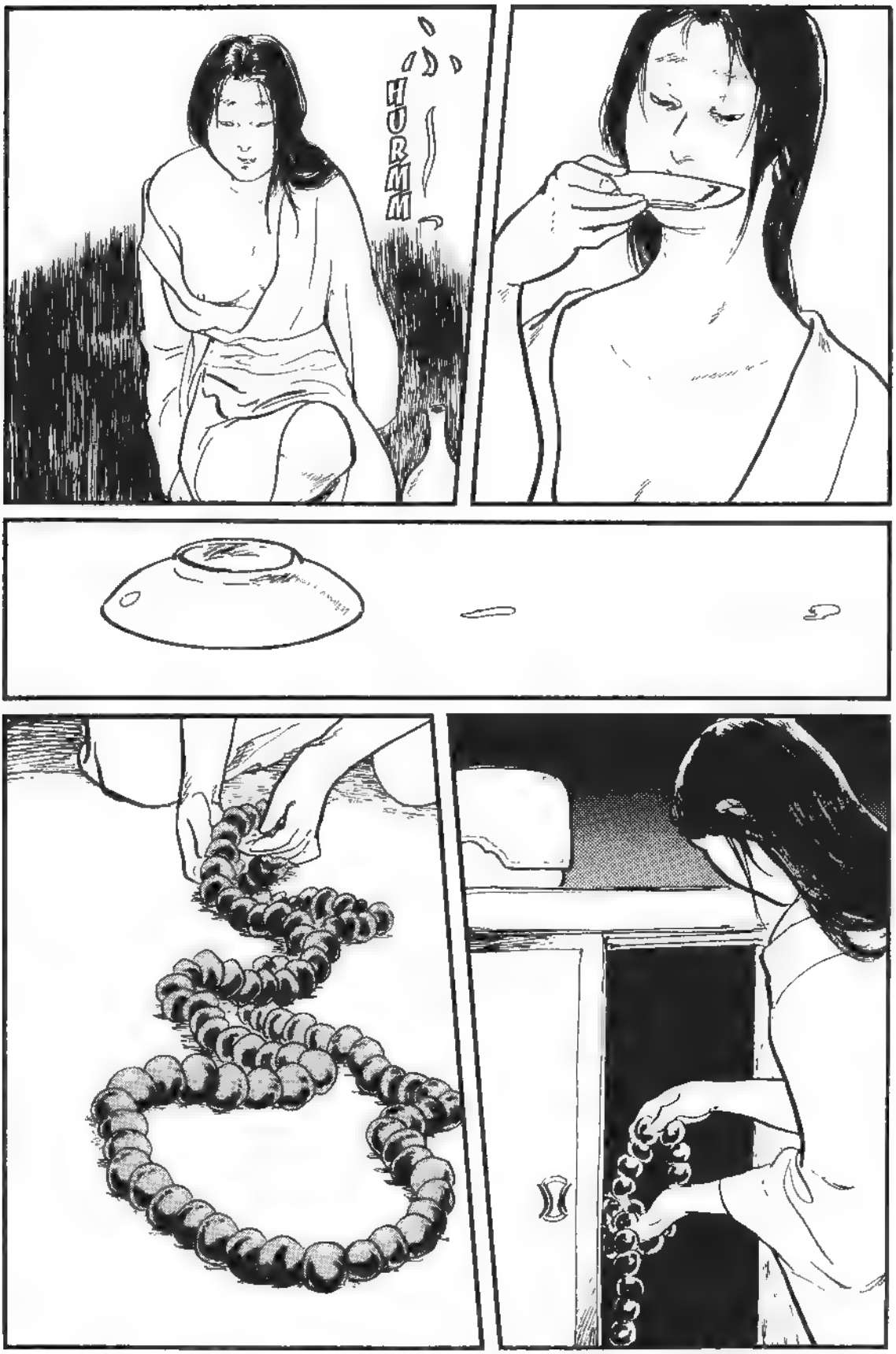
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOURSELF?
WILL NOBUNAGA GO SO FAR AS DEMANDING THEIR DEATH?
NO DOUBT HE WILL BE REVILED AS A SPINELESS COWARD AND A MERE HENCHMAN OF NOBUNAGA.
HE'LL BECOME THE LAUGHING-STOCK OF THE NATION, AND HIS VASSALS WILL LOSE FAITH IN HIM.
AND THE ODA-TOKUGAWA ALLIANCE WILL CRACK!
HE WILL! HE DEFINITELY WILL!
THIS IS VERY GOOD!

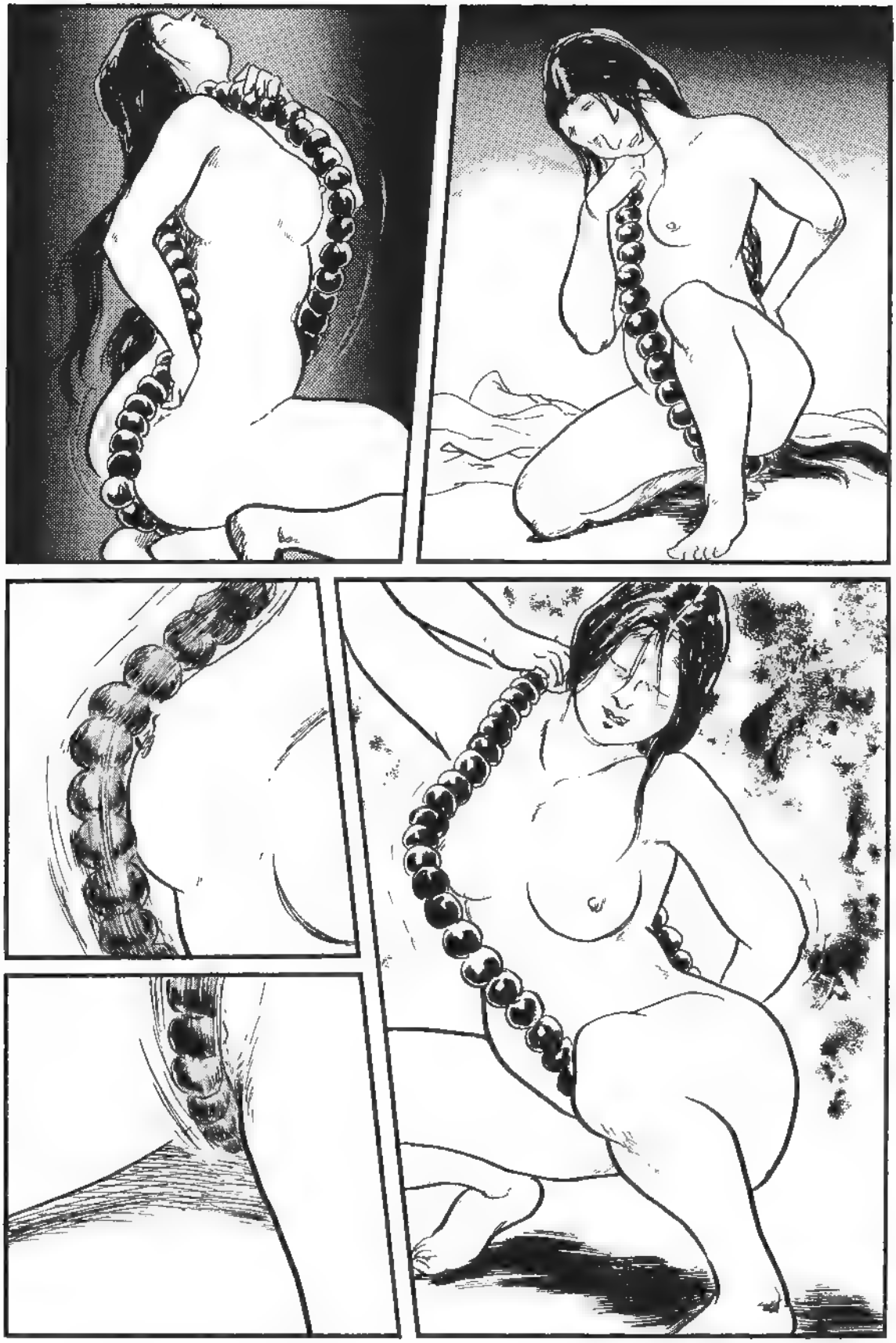
THANK YOU, SIR!
FINE! I'LL ALSO THROW IN A HUNDRED GOLD PIECES!
PRETTY WOMEN. FIVE OF THE BEST. AND THE HEAD OF HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI.
WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR THIS, SASUKE?
YES SIR.
COME CLOSER. LET'S DISCUSS THIS IN MORE DETAIL.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
ONCE TOKUGAWA IS DESTROYED, I'LL LET YOU DO WHATEVER YOU WANT WITH HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI.


OKAZAKI
CASTLE

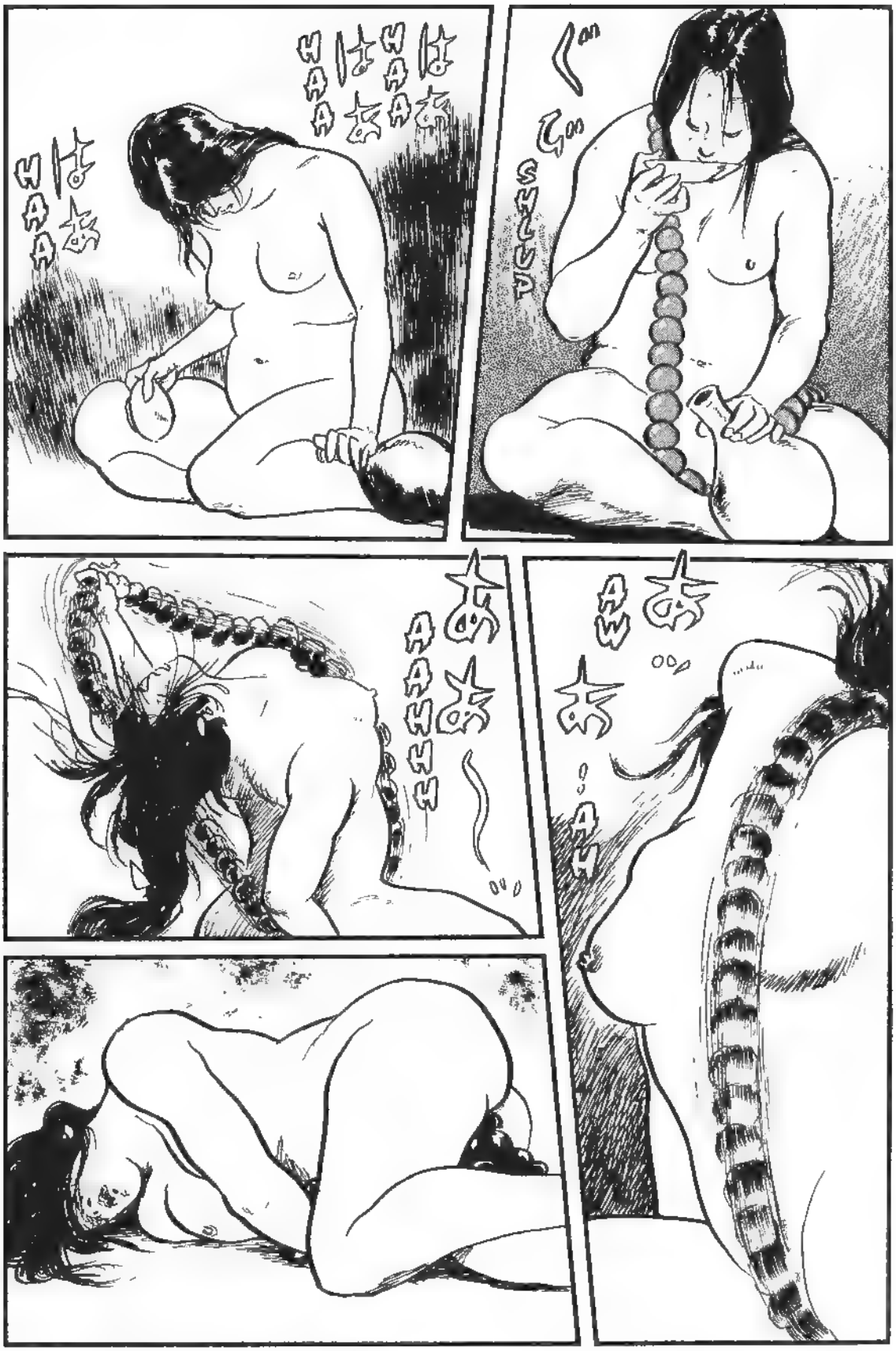


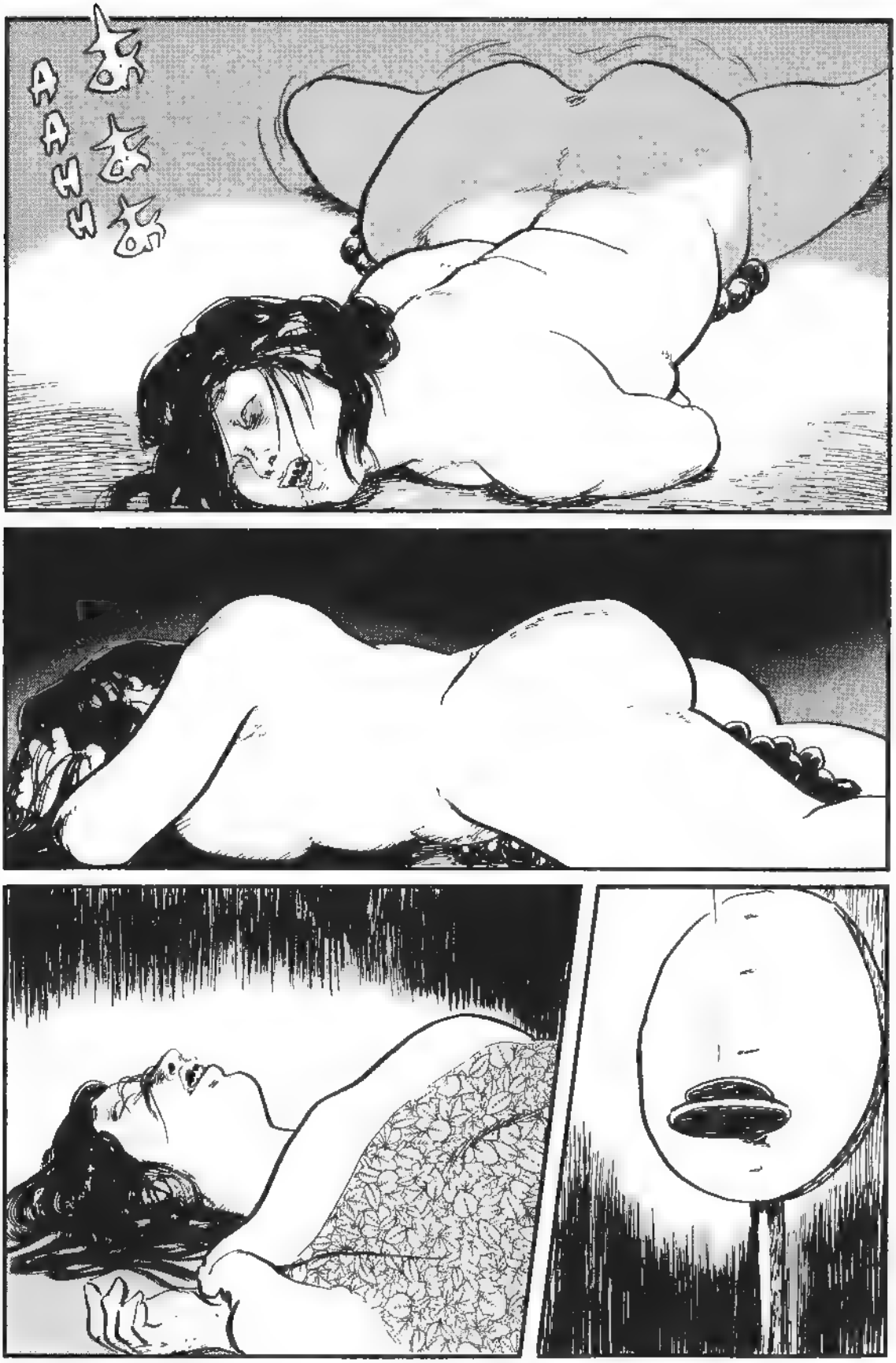
SLUP

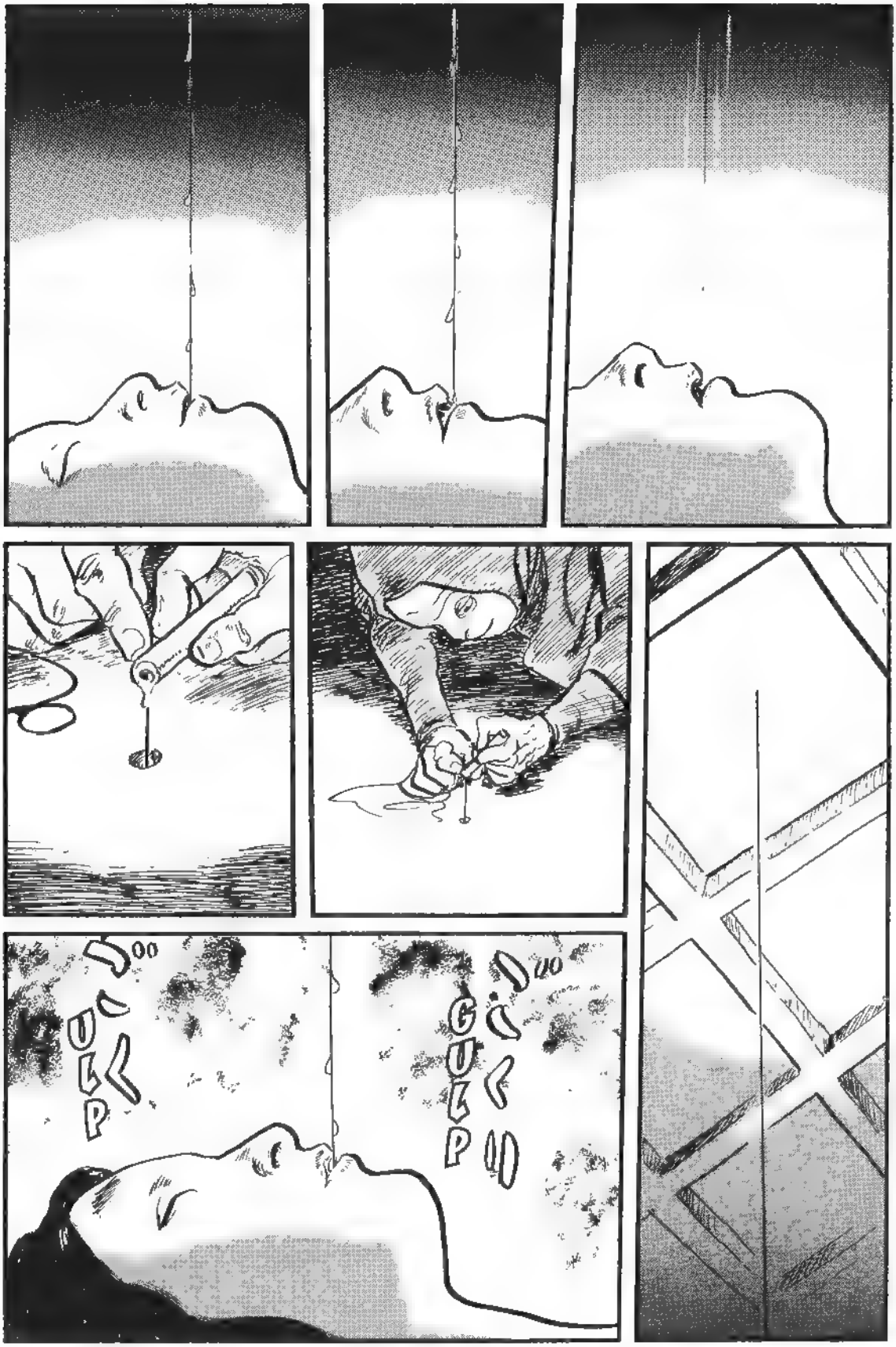

HURMM

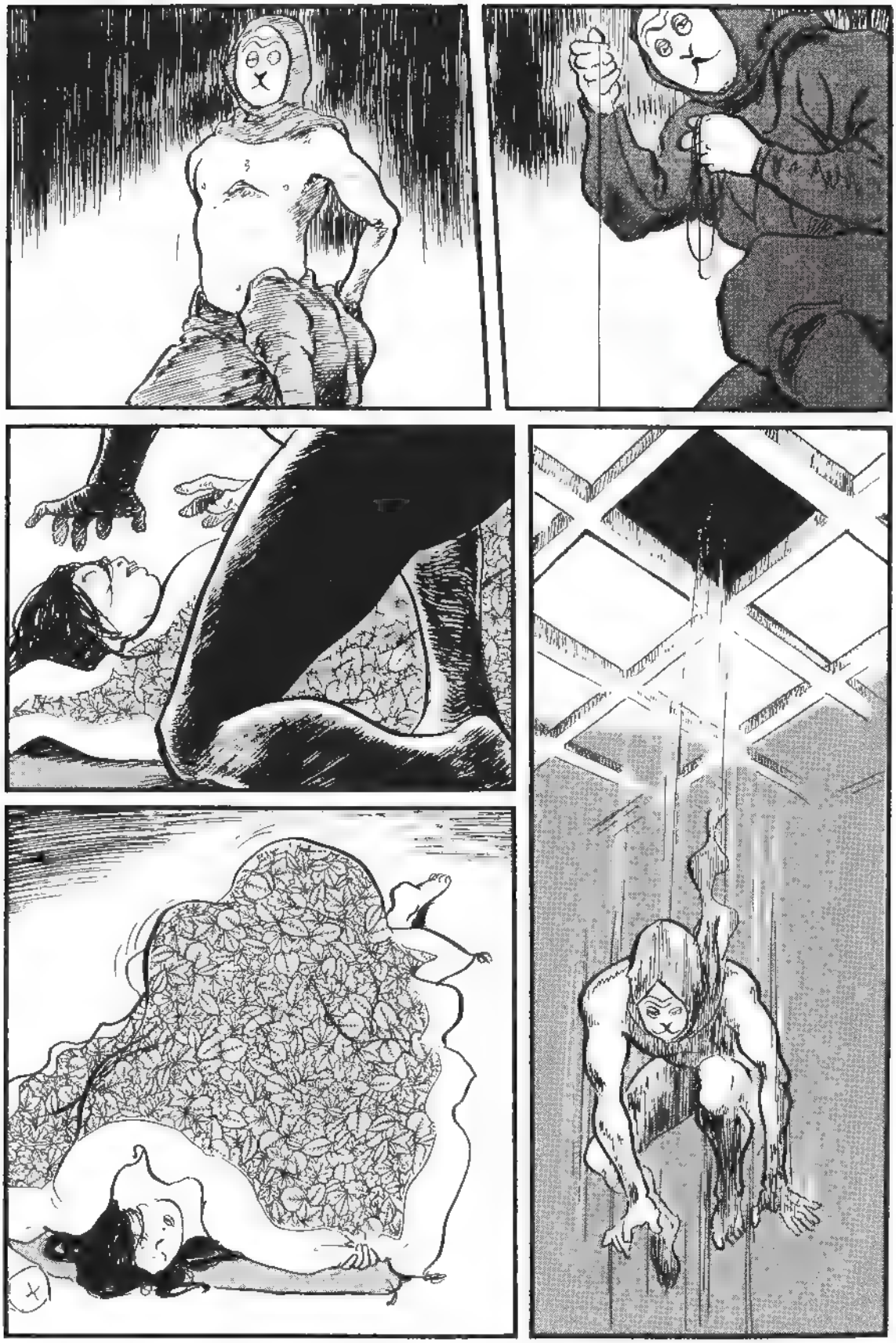


AWOO!!
HA
HA!
AW
HAHAHA


HAAA
HAAA
HAAA
Go on
SUCK
AAHHH
AW
AH!


AAHH


GULP
GULP

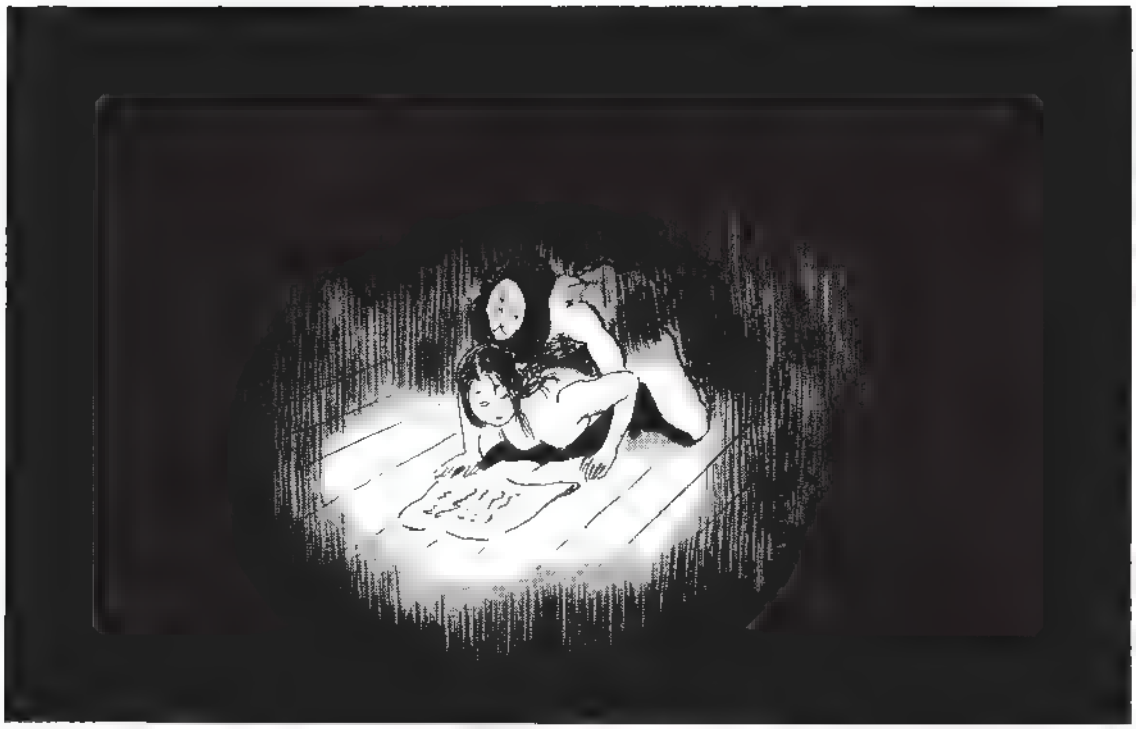


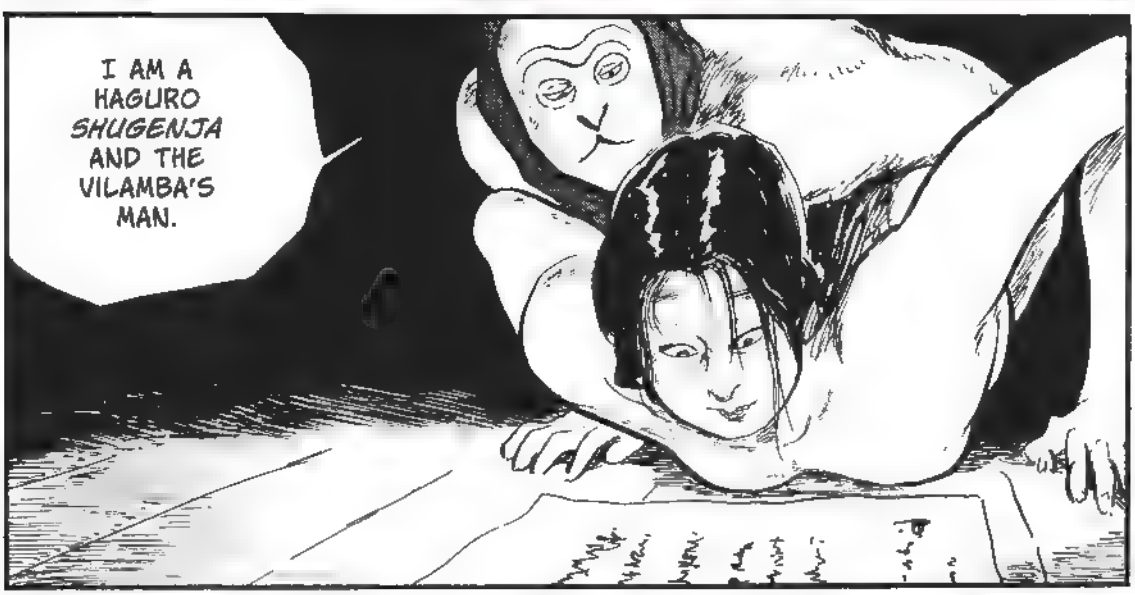
URR...
I AM TŌMA SASUKE, A VASSAL OF TAKEDA KATSUYORI.
AAHHH.
WH... WHO'S... DOING... THIS?!

THAT SAID, I USED TO BE A HUMBLE SERVANT OF IMAGAWA.
WHA... WHAAT? AHHH.
SO PLEASE PARDON ME FOR KEEPING MY MASK.
あぁっ！ AAH!
AH. AT LONG LAST, MY HEART'S DESIRE IS FULFILLED.
HIME-SAMA, I'VE BEEN IN LOVE WITH YOU AND YEARNED FOR THIS FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

おお
AHHHH〜"
おおAHHH
DD

AAHHH
THIS IS A LETTER FROM TAKEDA KATSUYORI-SAMA HIMSELF.
PLEASE TAKE AS MUCH TIME AS YOU WISH TO READ IT.




I AM A HAGURO *SHUGENJA* AND THE VILAMBA'S MAN.

THAT'S WHY I UNDERSTAND SO WELL WHY YOU ARE UNHAPPY.

IT'S THE FATE OF BLOOD. THE BLOOD OF IMAGAWA AND TOKUGAWA FLOW IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS.
THE TWO LINES WILL NEVER JOIN OR CIRCULATE TOGETHER.
BUT SINCE HE TOOK POSITION IN THE LEEWARD SIDE OF ODA, IT TURNED FATAL.
IF IEYASU-*DONO* DID NOT ALLY WITH ODA, IT MIGHT HAVE CONTINUED ON GENTLY...

IF NOBUYASU-DONO IS INDEED THE CHILD CONCEIVED BETWEEN YOU AND IEYASU-DONO, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE TO STOP THE BLOOD FROM STREAMING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS.
THERE'S ONE MORE THING. IF YOUR SON IS IEYASU-DONO'S AND HAS BOTH THE BLOOD OF IMAGAWA AND TOKUGAWA...
BUT NOBUYASU-DONO IS NOT IEYASU-DONO'S SON.
IF HE IS THE SON OF IMAGAWA UJIZANE-DONO, THE BLOOD IS ALREADY CASCADING DOWN TO HELL.
IT LOOKS LIKE I WAS RIGHT. HOW PERFECT.

YOUR MISERY WILL SEE NO END. IT PAINS ME TO IMAGINE HOW YOU MUST SUFFER.
WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW, MILADY?

AT THIS POINT, MILADY, THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE YOU AND NOBUYASU-*SAMA* IS TO MIX WITH TAKEDA'S BLOOD.
THE BLOOD OF TAKEDA IS A BLOOD THAT FLOWS ALONG WITH TOKUGAWA-- NOT AGAINST.
URR...

THERE IS NO NEED FOR YOU TO OBEY SOMEONE WHO'S NOT YOUR HUSBAND NOR YOUR SON'S FATHER. NOT ANY MORE.
AHHHHH
TURN YOUR BACK ON IEYASU-DONO.
BEFORE YOU SINK TO HELL, YOU SHOULD HOLD YOUR GROUND!

AS YOU CAN SEE IN KATSUYORI-SAMA'S LETTER, ONCE NOBUYASU-SAMA SIDES WITH TAKEDA AND THE FLAG MARK OF FŪRINKAZAN SWEEPS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, NOBUYASU-SAMA SHALL TAKE CONTROL OF THE ENTIRE FIEFDOM OF TOKUGAWA AS HIS OWN.
IN ADDITION, ONCE YOU CONSENT TO THIS PLAN, I SHALL WAIT UPON YOU AND BE AT YOUR SERVICE FOREVER, MILADY.
FURTHERMORE, IF HE DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF IN THE PROCESS, KATSUYORI-SAMA IS WILLING TO GRANT HIM ADDITIONAL FIEFS. HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY IGNORE SUCH A PROPOSITION?

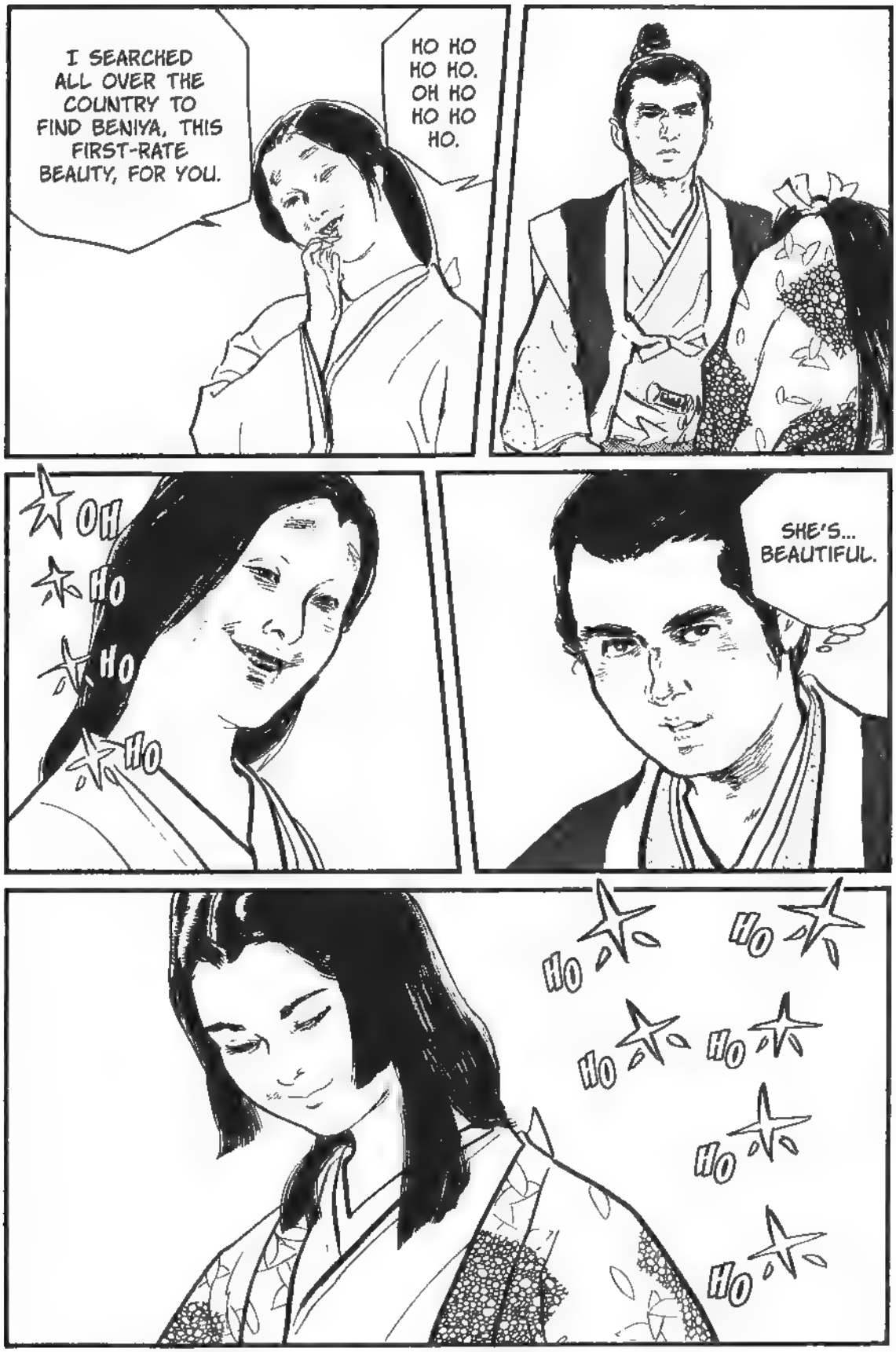
AHHH. MORE.
AHHHAAH
MORE.
A LITTLE MORE.
AAAH.
HYŪGA BENIYA, SEVENTEEN. SHE IS A FIRST-RATE BEAUTY, EVERYWHERE UNDER THE SUN.
I BROUGHT ALONG A GIRL FROM TAKEDA WITH ME.

SHE IS A GIFT FROM KATSUYORI-SAMA TO NOBUYASU-SAMA.
PLEASE LET NOBUYASU-SAMA MAKE LOVE TO HER, AND DON'T EVER LET HIM MIX BLOOD WITH NOBUNAGA'S DAUGHTER, TOKU-HIME-DONO.
MILADY, PLEASE ENSURE IT IS DONE.

ああ

STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP

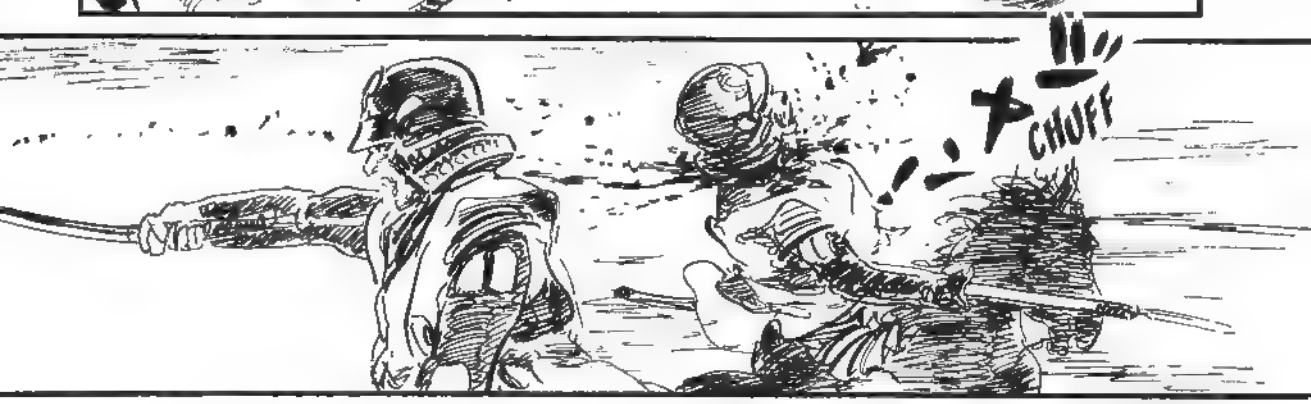
YOU ASKED FOR ME, MOTHER?
I AM HYŪGA BENIYA.


I SEARCHED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY TO FIND BENIYA, THIS FIRST-RATE BEAUTY, FOR YOU.
HO HO HO HO. OH HO HO HO HO.
OH HO HO HO
SHE'S... BEAUTIFUL.
HO HO HO HO HO

ドTRUM ドTRUM

TOKUGAWA AND TAKEDA BROKE INTO SKIRMISHES EVERYWHERE.
SHUCKK

AND WHEN IEYASU WON THE SURRENDER OF NAGASHINO CASTLE, KATSUYORI MARCHED ALL THE WAY TO TŌTŌMI TO TAKE OVER TAKATENJIN CASTLE.


CHUFF

NEITHER WAS WILLING TO YIELD AN INCH, AND THEY WERE GRADUALLY BUILDING UP TO A GREAT CRASH.

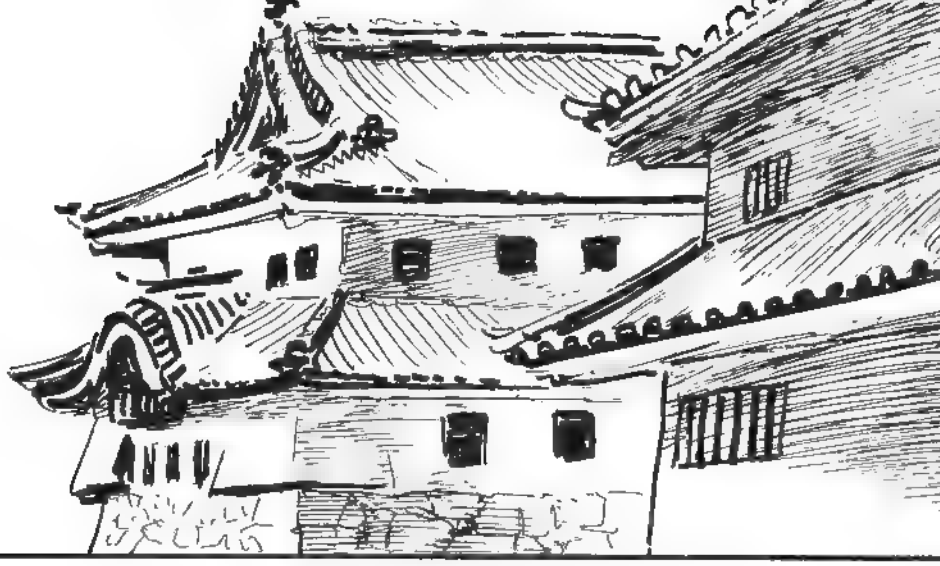
IN COMPARISON, TAKEDA POSSESSED THE EQUIVALENT OF ONE MILLION, TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY THOUSAND *KOKU* AND COULD MOBILIZE THIRTY-THREE THOUSAND SOLDIERS AT ANY TIME. THERE WAS A MARKED DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM.

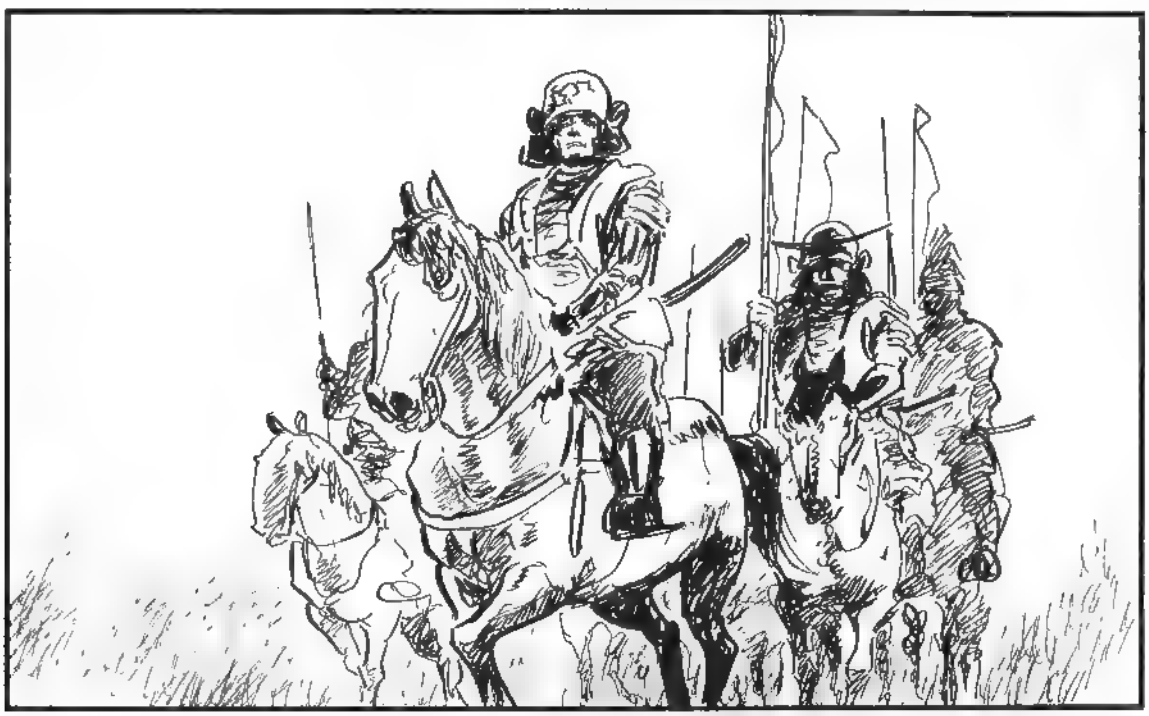
HOWEVER, IN TERMS OF BATTLE STRENGTH, THE TOKUGAWA SIDE WAS CLEARLY AT A DISADVANTAGE. WHEN THEY LOST THE BATTLE OF MIKATAGAHARA, THEY LOST MORE THAN EIGHTY THOUSAND *KOKU*, REDUCING THEM TO JUST FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTY THOUSAND *KOKU*, WHICH EQUATES TO TWELVE THOUSAND SOLDIERS.

NOBUYASU'S SWORD MUST BE QUITE THICK AND HEAVY.
IT BREAKS HELMETS APART AND EASILY CUTS THE ENEMY IN HALF.
AND FEARSOME... INDEED.
HOW APPALLING.

HE JUST DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO FALTER.
EVER SINCE HE FOUGHT HIS FIRST CAMPAIGN, I'VE WATCHED HIM CLOSELY, NEVER LOOKING AWAY.
EXCELLENT VALOR, I SAY.
SOMETIMES HE EVEN LOOKS AS IF HE ENJOYS THE BATTLE.
IF I COULD SENSE ANY DESPERATION, I WOULD BE NERVOUS AS HIS FATHER. BUT SEEING HOW HE TAKES EVERYTHING IN STRIDE, I DON'T FEEL LIKE HE'S MY SON.
IF THERE WAS ANY HINT OF TERROR IN HIS FACE OR IN THE WAY HE CARRIED HIMSELF...

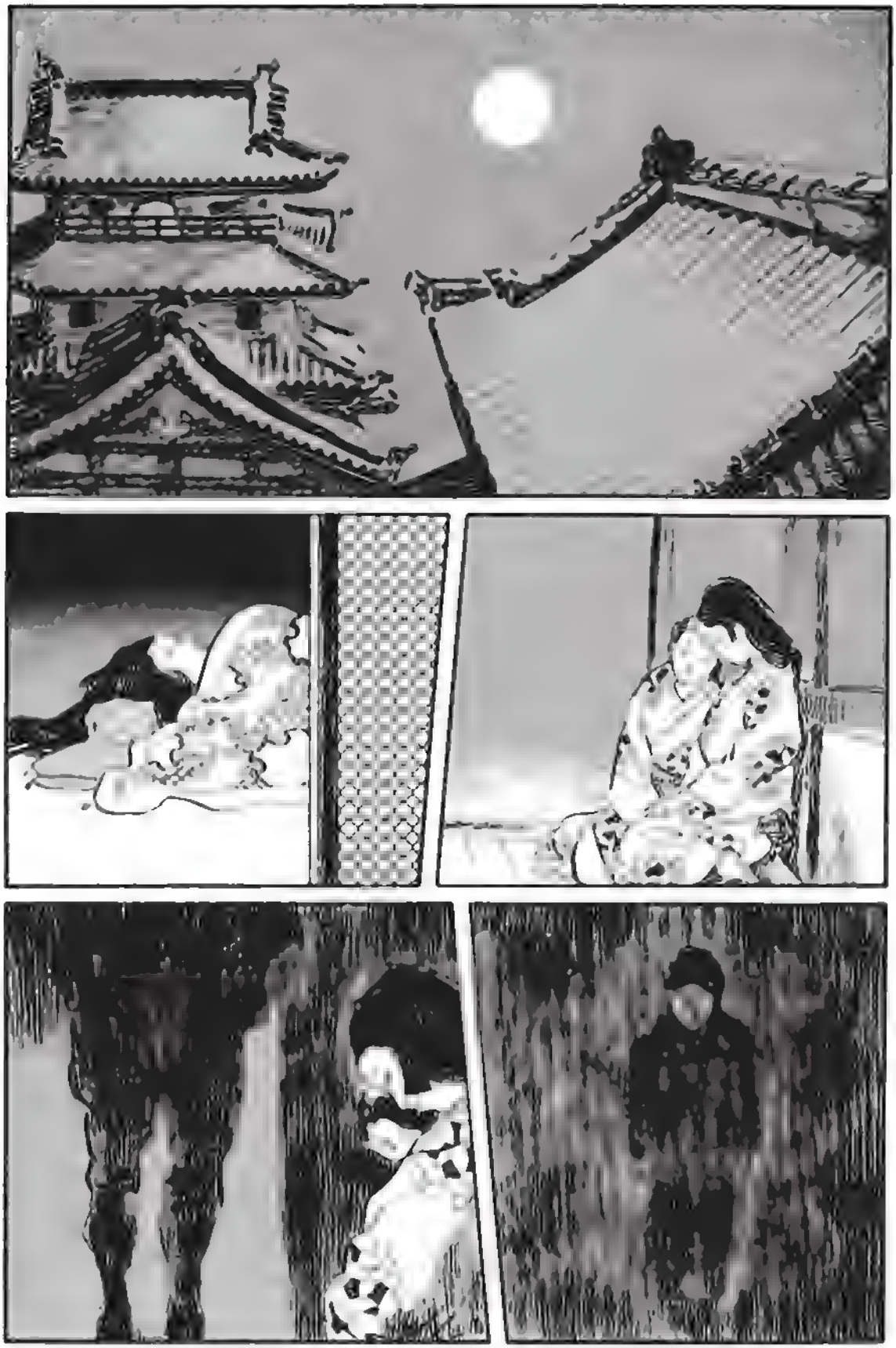
IN SOME WAYS I ALMOST DON'T EVEN CARE IF HE LIVES OR DIES.
I WONDER WHOSE BLOOD FLOWS IN HIS VEINS.
HE LAUGHS AS HE SPATTERS THEIR GORE.
GA HA HA HA HA





MILADY.
STILL, YOU MAY WANT TO WELCOME HIM HOME...

WHAT A PRETTY GIRL.
NO IDEA.
WHO IS SHE?

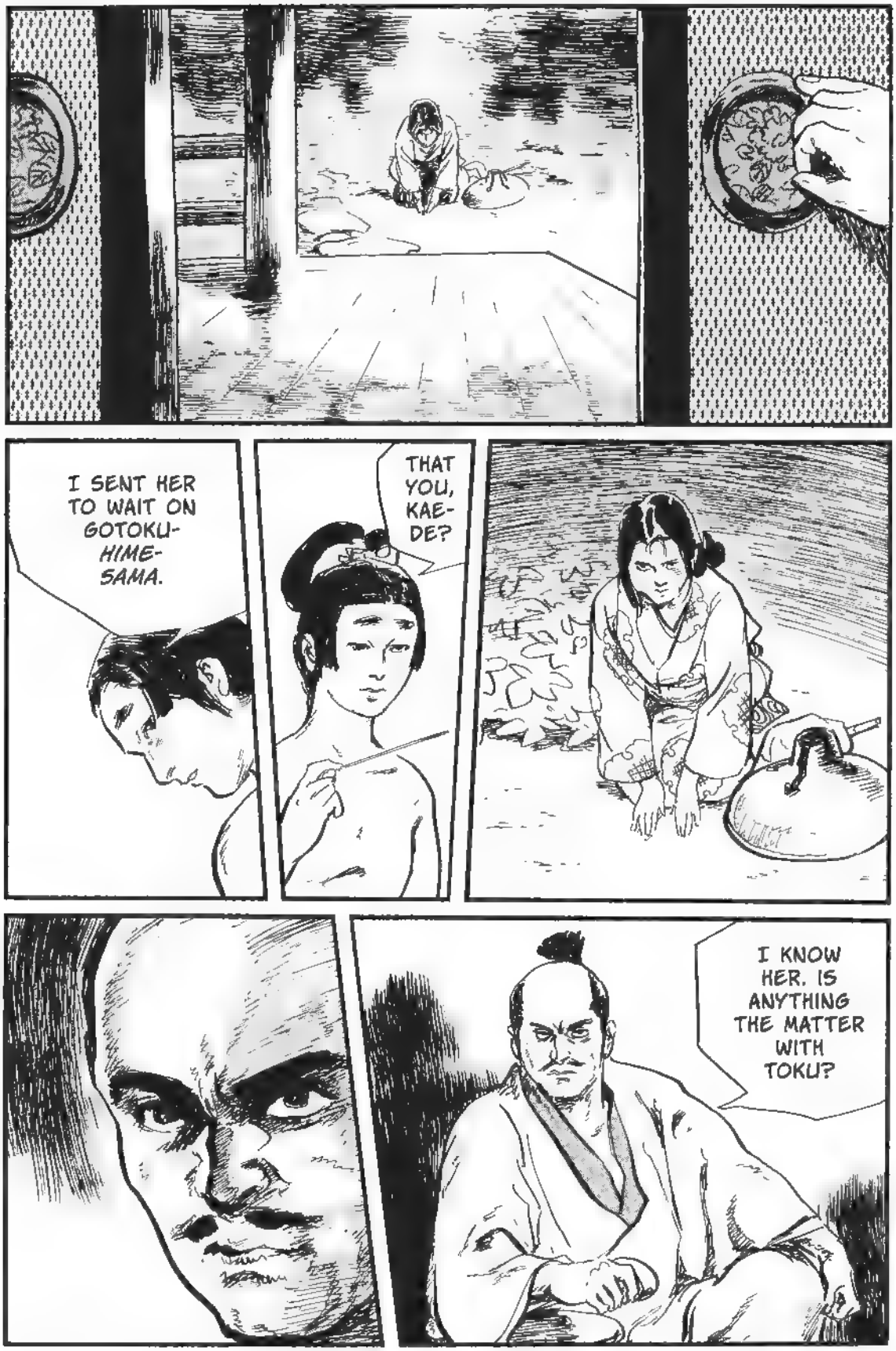


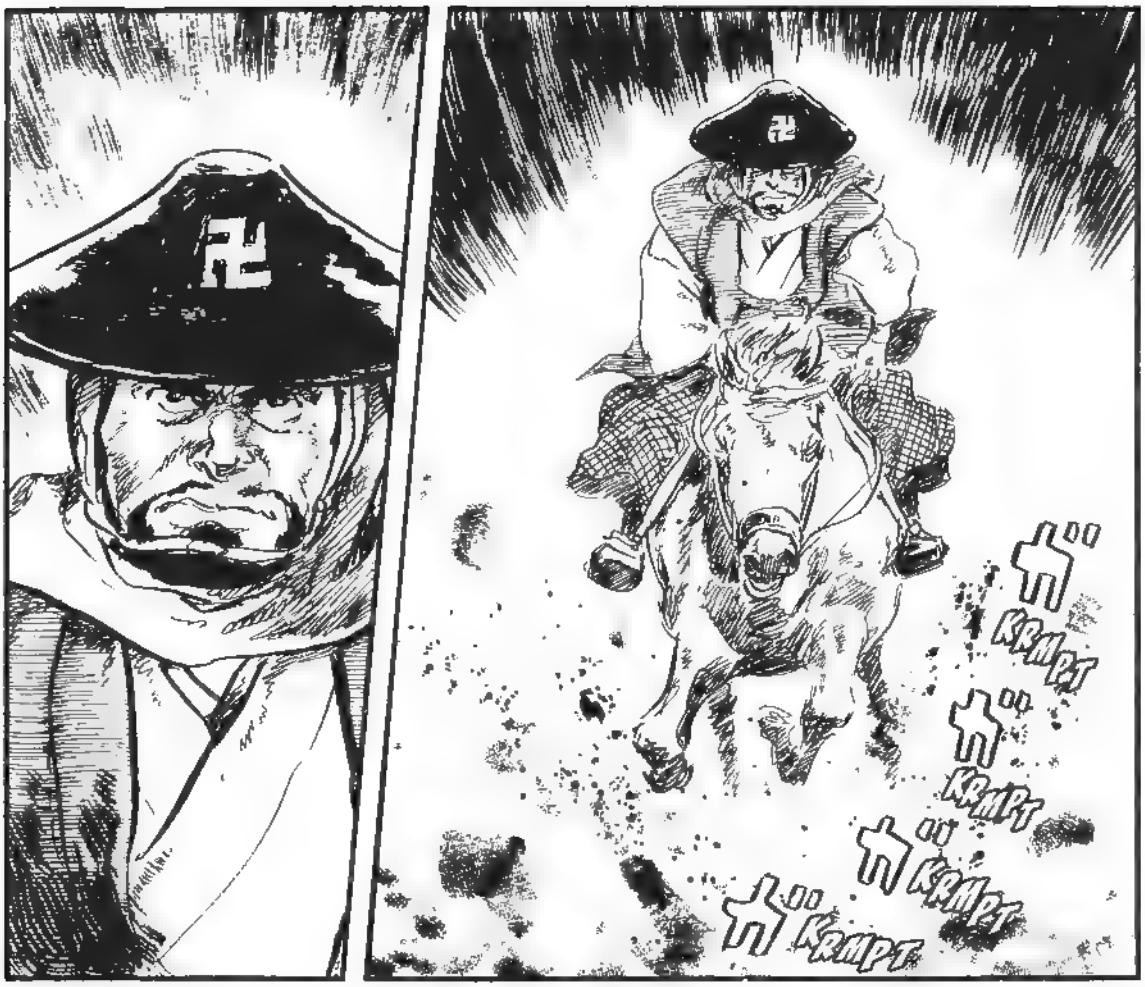
CHITTE HARITE SHAMITAVI.
ANYE MANYE MAMANE.
SHAME.

AHHH, NOBUYASU-SAMA!
AHHHH

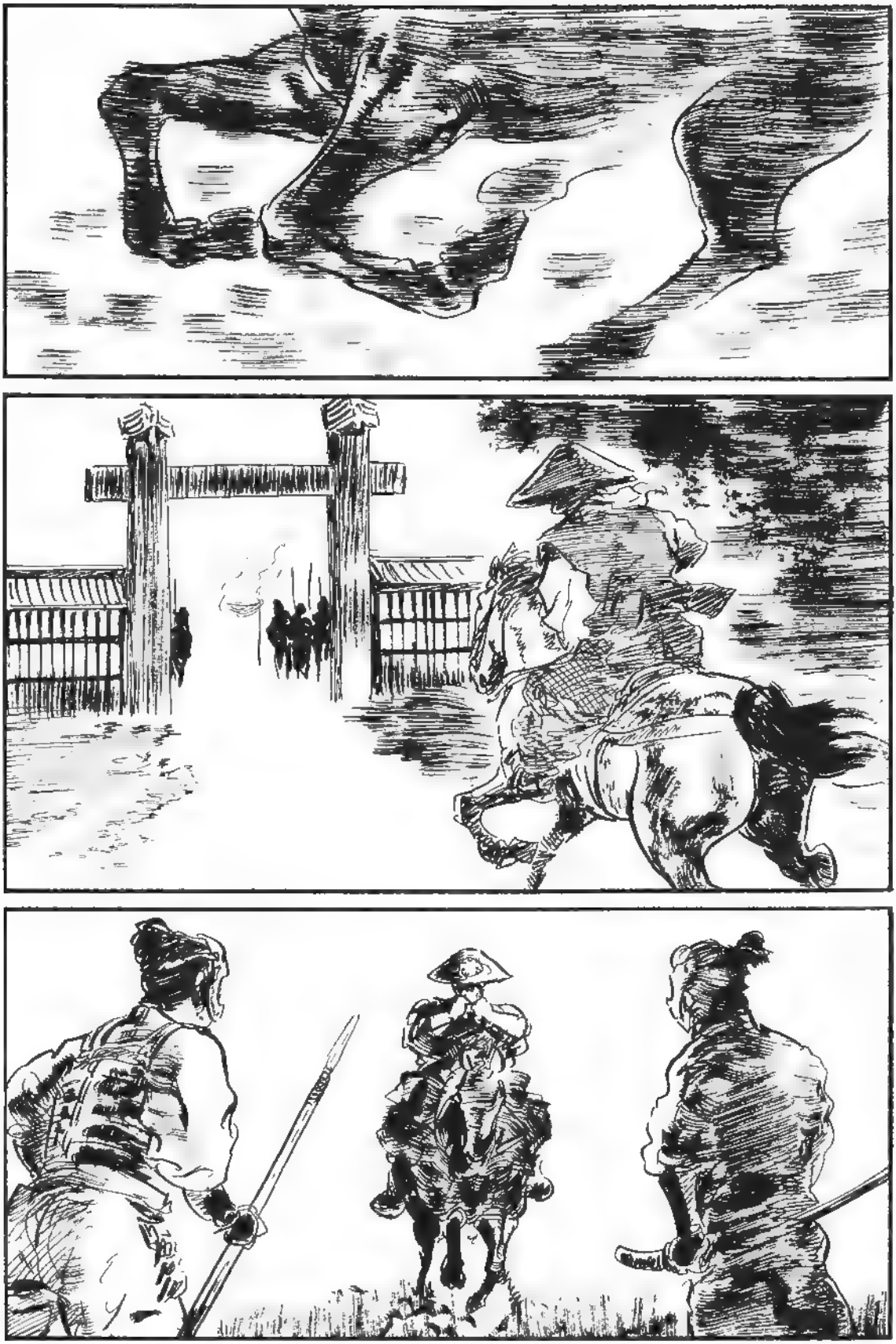
AW!
AHHH!
NOBUYASU-
SAMA!
AAAHHH
AAAHHH

ハァ!

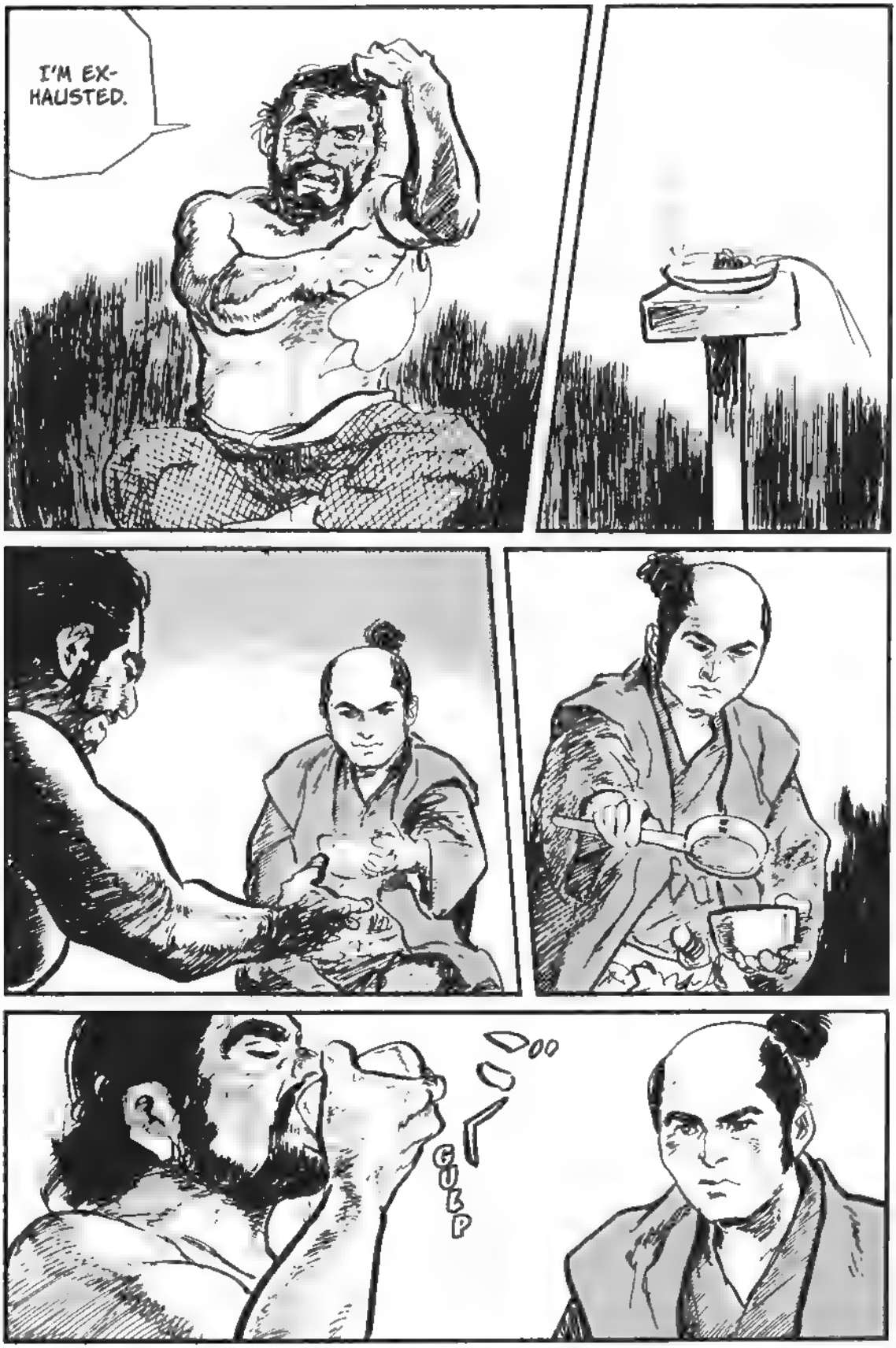

I SENT HER TO WAIT ON GOTOKU-HIME-SAMA.
THAT YOU, KAE-DE?
I KNOW HER. IS ANYTHING THE MATTER WITH TOKU?


KRMPT
KRMPT
KRMPT
KRMPT

HYAA!
HYAA!

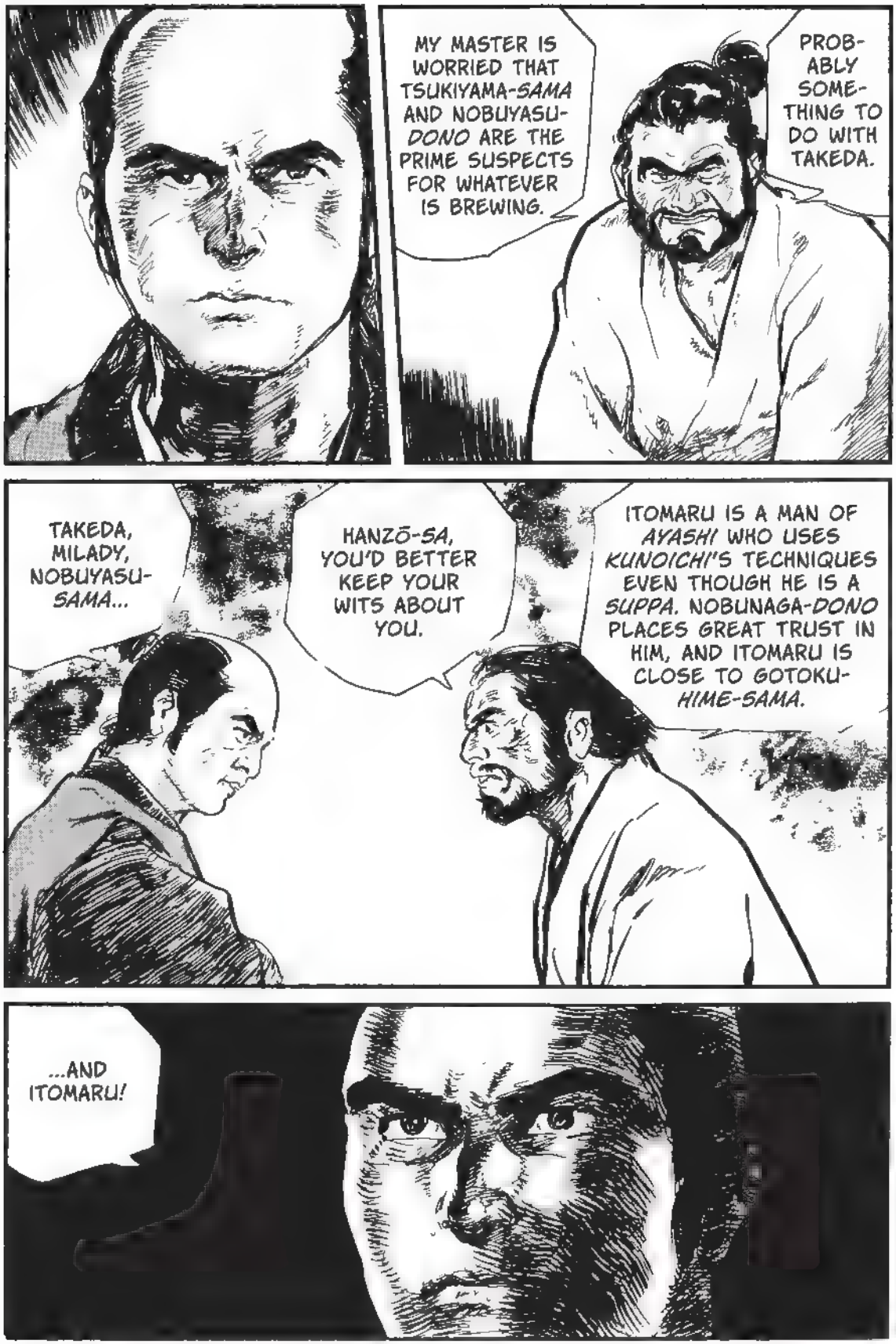


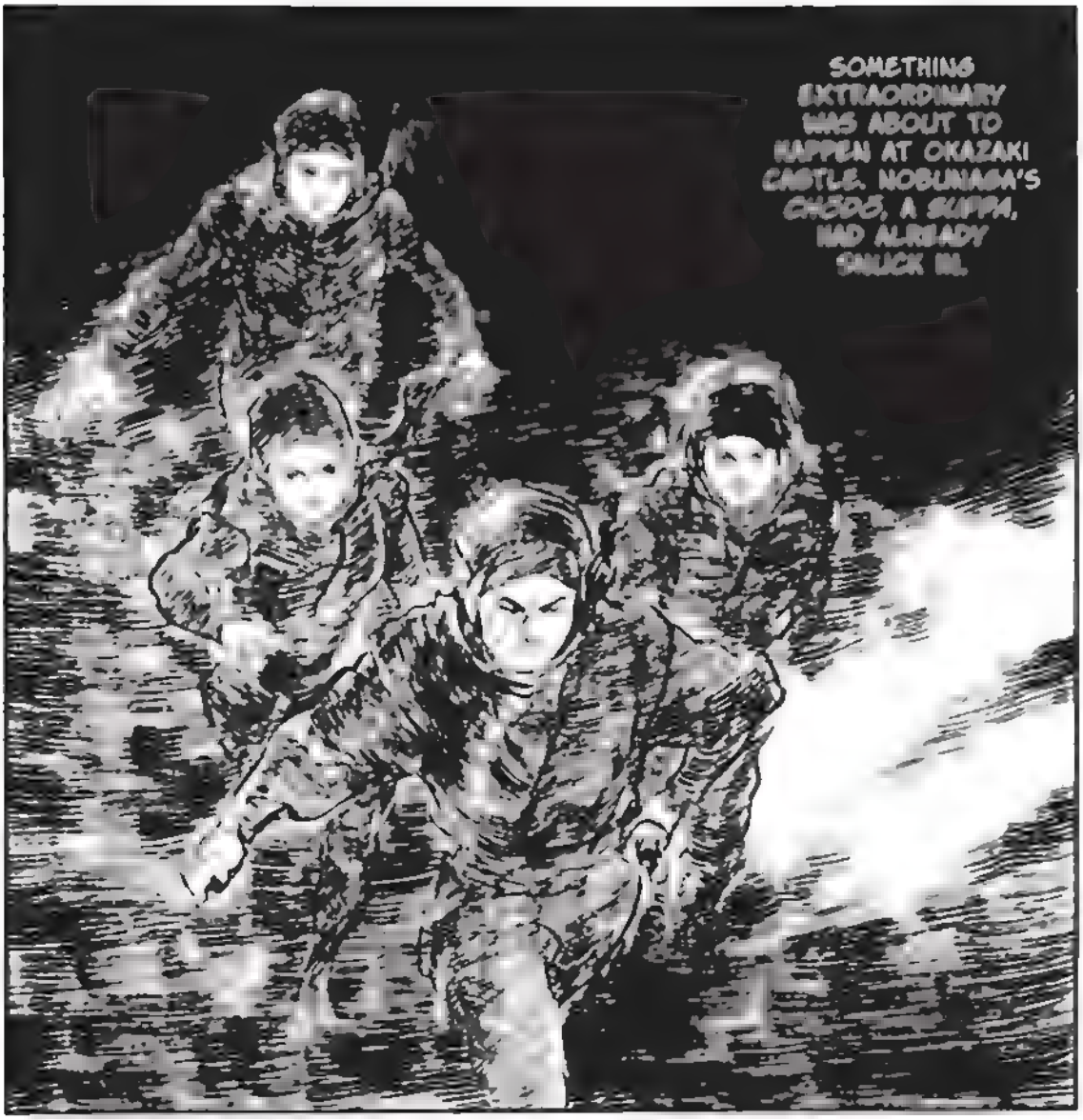
I HAVE AN URGENT MESSAGE, SO I MUST PUSH ON.
I AM HACHISUKA KOROKU, A VASSAL OF HASHIBA *CHIKUZEN-NO-KAMI* HIDEYOSHI!
PARDON ME FOR NOT DIS-MOUNTING.


I'M EX-
HAUSTED.
GULP

IT HURTS.
AND YET AGAIN, I AM ASKED TO DO A SUPPA'S JOB.
HANZŌ-SA, I MAY NOT LOOK IT, BUT I'M NOW A GENERAL WITH FIVE HUNDRED MEN TO COMMAND.
AND WHY WAS IT SENT TO ME, NOT MY LORD?
WHAT IS THIS URGENT MESSAGE FROM HIDEYOSHI-SAMA?
ITOMARU? YOU MEAN, THE ORPHAN CHILD OF THE LATE SUPPA, KAGERŌ? FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, HE WORKS FOR NOBUNAGA-SAMA NOW.
HE TOLD ME TO LET YOU KNOW THAT ITOMARU HAS SNUCK INTO OKAZAKI.

I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF HIM ONCE. I WAS MESMERIZED.
HE DOES. HE IS NOBUNAGA-*DONO*'S *CHŌDŌ*. EVEN THOUGH HE IS A BOY, HIS BEAUTY IS ALMOST OUT OF THIS WORLD.
FROM WHAT I UNDERSTAND, GOTOKU-*HIME-SAMA* SENT A MESSENGER TO KIYOSU TO ASK FOR HELP.
WHY DID ITOMARU COME TO OKAZAKI?
BUT THE FACT IS, SOMETHING IS BREWING IN OKAZAKI CASTLE.
MY MASTER TOLD ME THAT'S ALL HE KNOWS.


MY MASTER IS WORRIED THAT TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA* AND NOBUYASU-*DONO* ARE THE PRIME SUSPECTS FOR WHATEVER IS BREWING.
PROB-ABLY SOME-THING TO DO WITH TAKEDA.
TAKEDA, MILADY, NOBUYASU-*SAMA*...
HANZŌ-*SA*, YOU'D BETTER KEEP YOUR WITS ABOUT YOU.
ITOMARU IS A MAN OF *AYASHI* WHO USES *KUNOICHI*'S TECHNIQUES EVEN THOUGH HE IS A *SUPPA*. NOBUNAGA-*DONO* PLACES GREAT TRUST IN HIM, AND ITOMARU IS CLOSE TO GOTOKU-*HIME-SAMA*.
...AND ITOMARU!


SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN AT OKAZAKI CASTLE. NOBUNAGA'S CHŌDŌ, A SKIPPA, HAD ALREADY SNUCK IN.

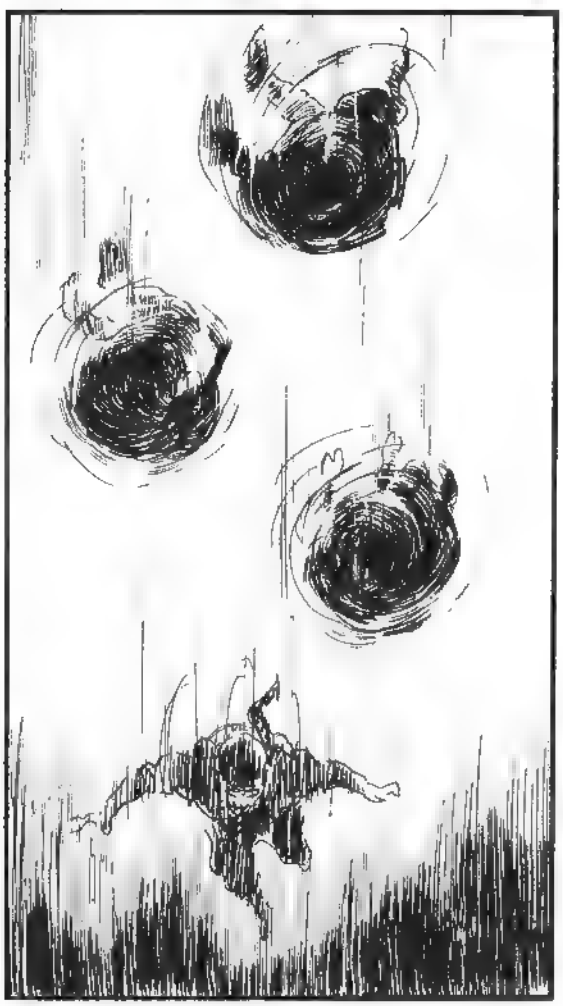
MORTIFIED, HANZŌ FLEW THROUGH THE PARK.

YOU'RE TOO SLOW! HURRY!

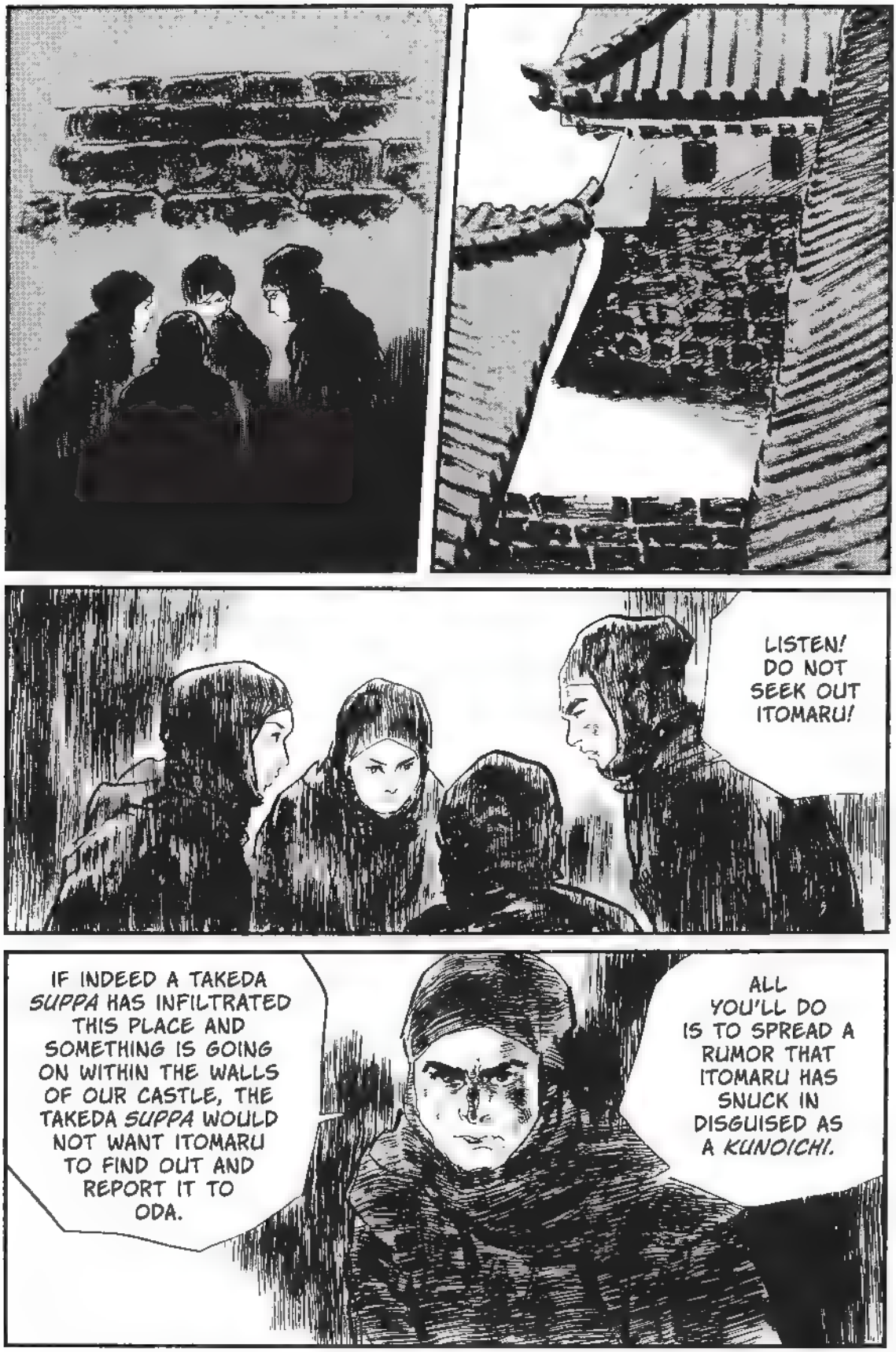
IT MUST BE AN EARTHSHAKING CRISIS, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE IT WAS HASHIBA *CHIKUZEN-NO-KAMI* HIDEYOSHI WHO'D BROUGHT THE NEWS TO HANZŌ'S ATTENTION.

BUT WHY DID HIDEYOSHI SHOW SO MUCH GOODWILL TOWARD TOKUGAWA?

HANZŌ CAME UP WITH HIS OWN ANSWER AS HE RACED ALONG.
IT WAS PROBABLY BECAUSE...

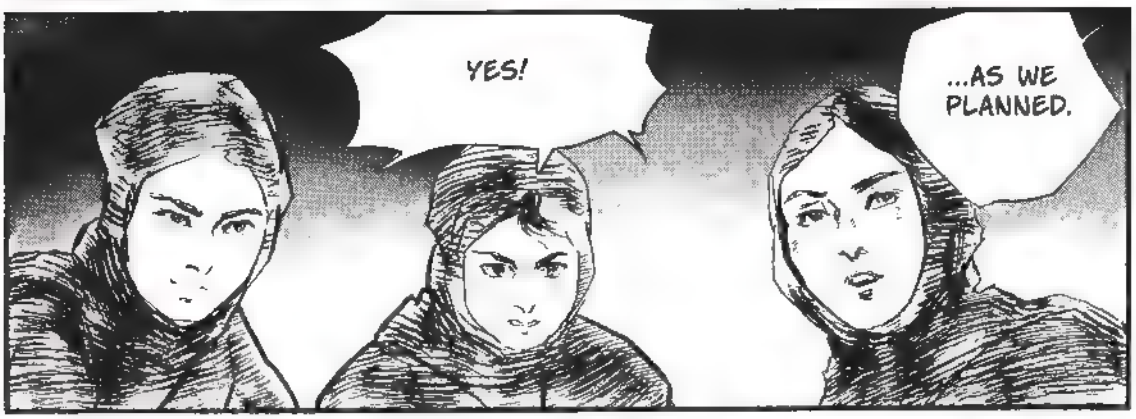


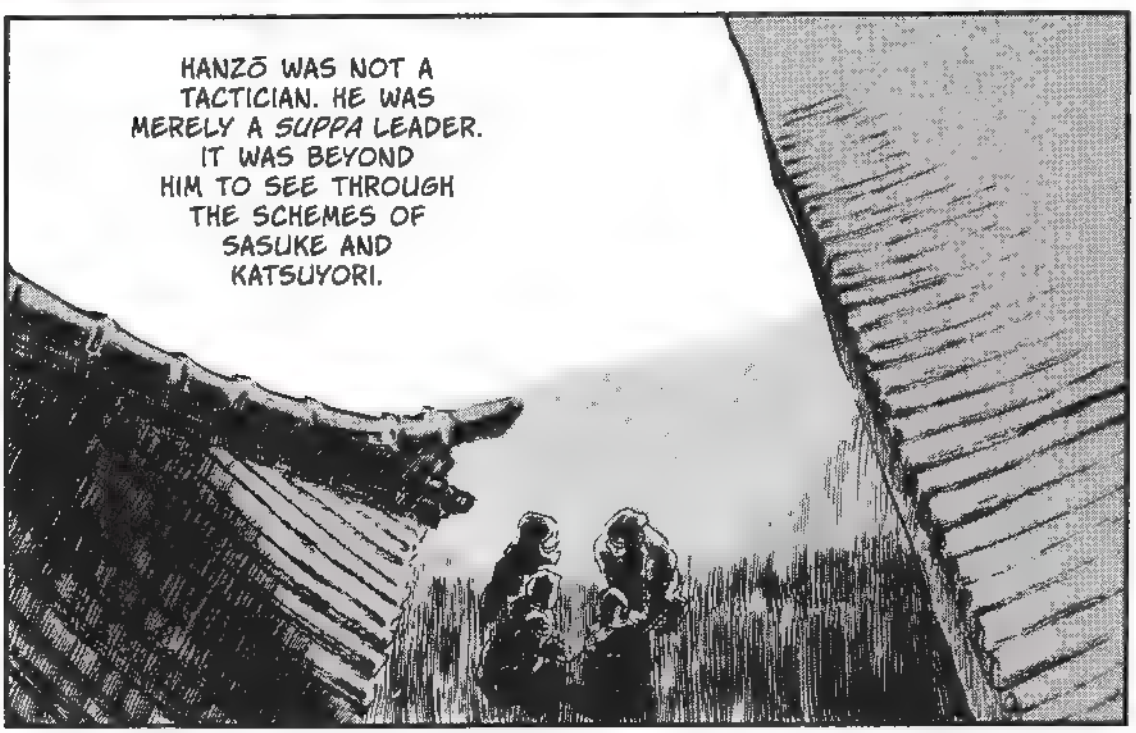
THAT WAS WHY THE OTHER GENERALS FELT SUCH STRONG ANTIPATHY. HE PROBABLY THOUGHT THAT COUNTING ON AND ALLYING WITH TOKUGAWA WOULD SECURE HIS FUTURE... SO HANZŌ REASONED.
WITHIN ODA'S MAIN CAMP, HIDEYOSHI WAS A NEWCOMER AND A SELF-MADE MAN

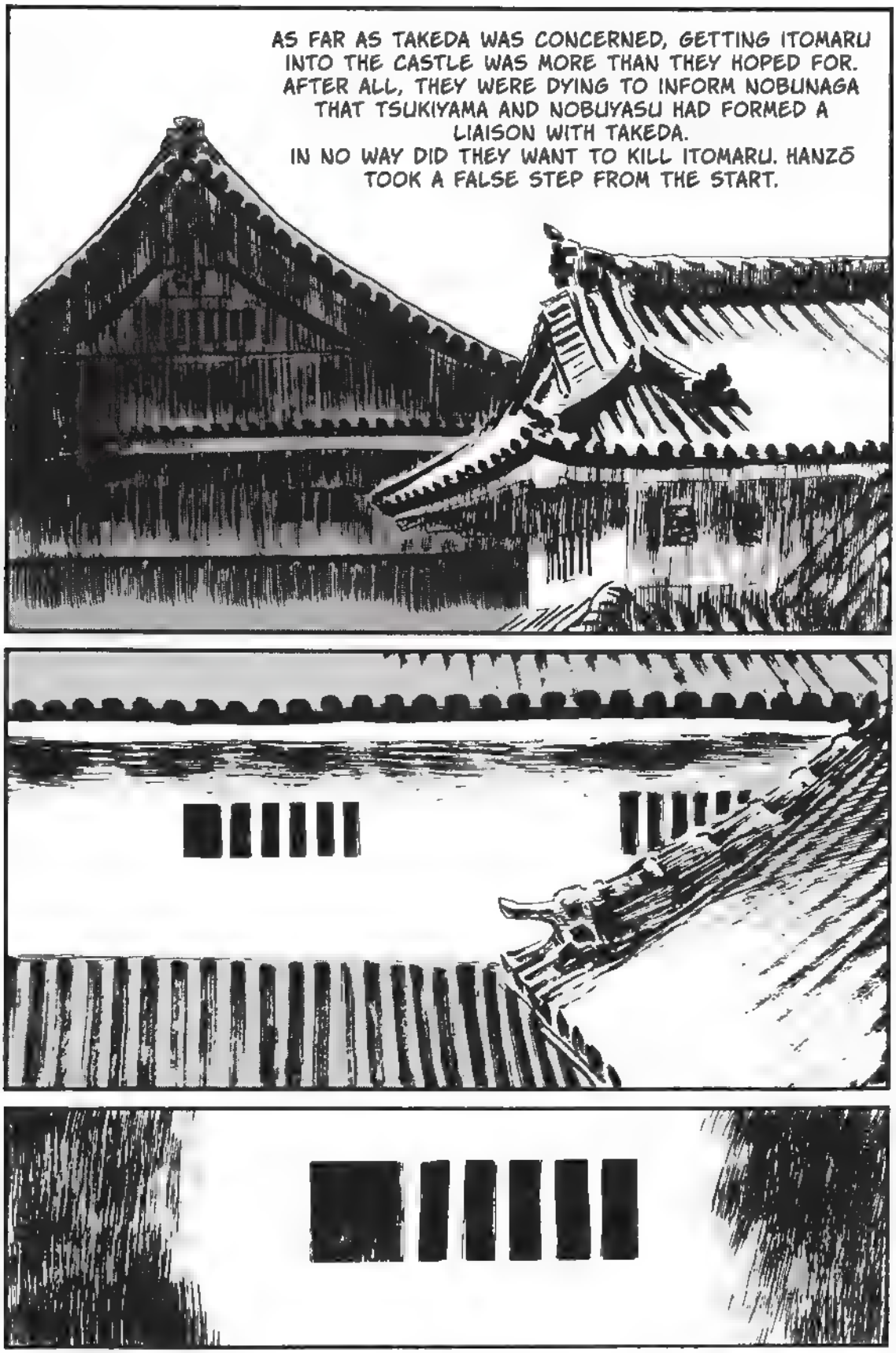

LISTEN! DO NOT SEEK OUT ITOMARU!
IF INDEED A TAKEDA *SUPPA* HAS INFILTRATED THIS PLACE AND SOMETHING IS GOING ON WITHIN THE WALLS OF OUR CASTLE, THE TAKEDA *SUPPA* WOULD NOT WANT ITOMARU TO FIND OUT AND REPORT IT TO ODA.
ALL YOU'LL DO IS TO SPREAD A RUMOR THAT ITOMARU HAS SNUCK IN DISGUISED AS A *KUNOICHI*.

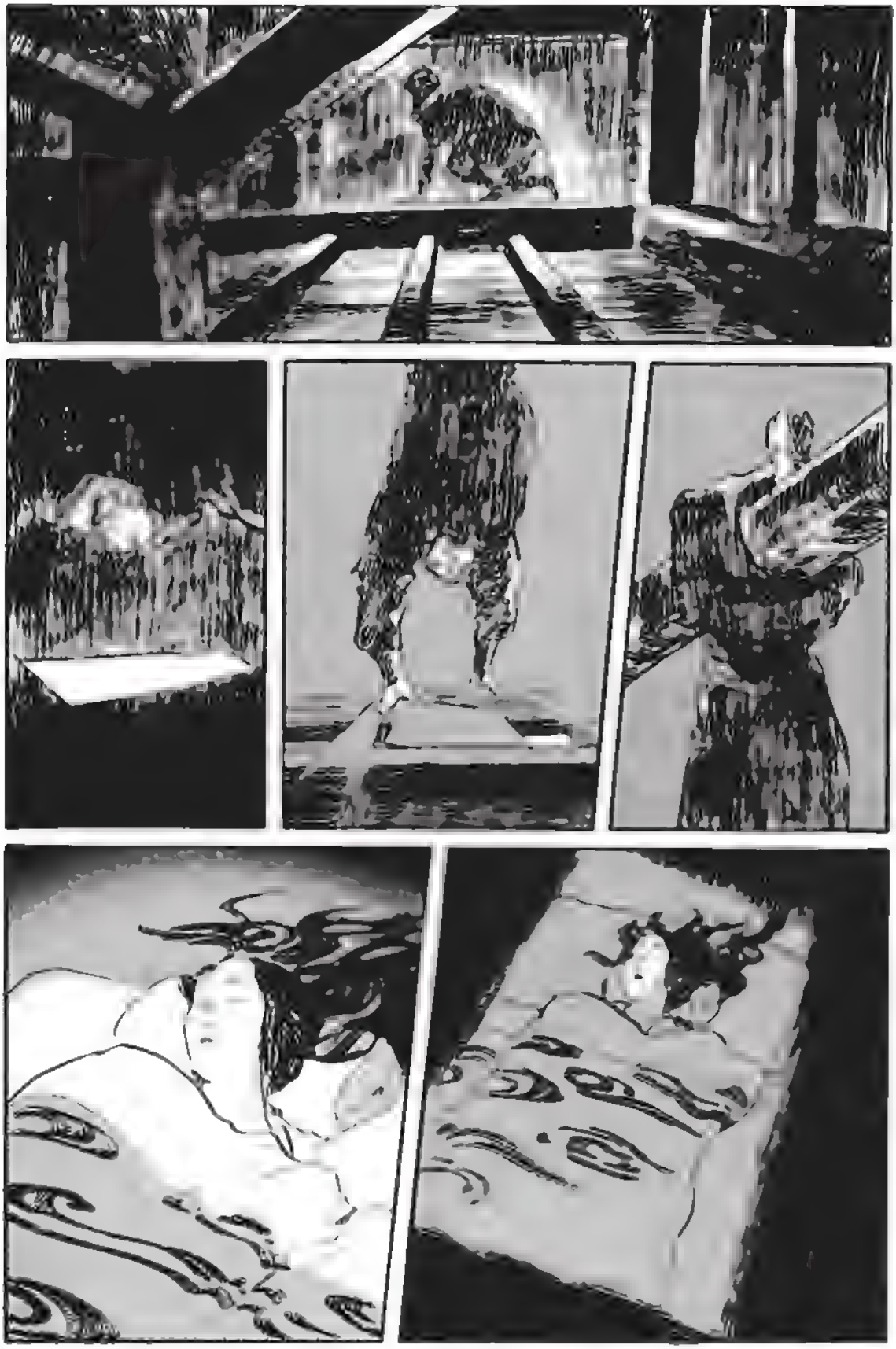
AND THAT MEANS THE TAKEDA *SUPPA* WILL MAKE A MOVE TO ELIMINATE ITOMARU.
THAT IS OUR FOCUS. WE WILL TERMINATE THE TAKEDA *SUPPA* WITHOUT ITOMARU DOING IT FOR US!
THEN WE'LL ASK ITOMARU TO RETURN TO ODA.
I'LL ASSURE HIM THAT WE, THE *IGAMONO*, ARE HERE TO TAKE CARE OF ANY SITUATION ARISING WITHIN TOKUGAWA.
USING ITOMARU'S NAME, WE WILL EXPOSE THE TAKEDA *SUPPA*. AND THEN USING THE TAKEDA *SUPPA*, WE'LL BLOCK ITOMARU. THAT'S THE ONLY WAY IT WILL WORK.
I WON'T LET HIM REFUSE.

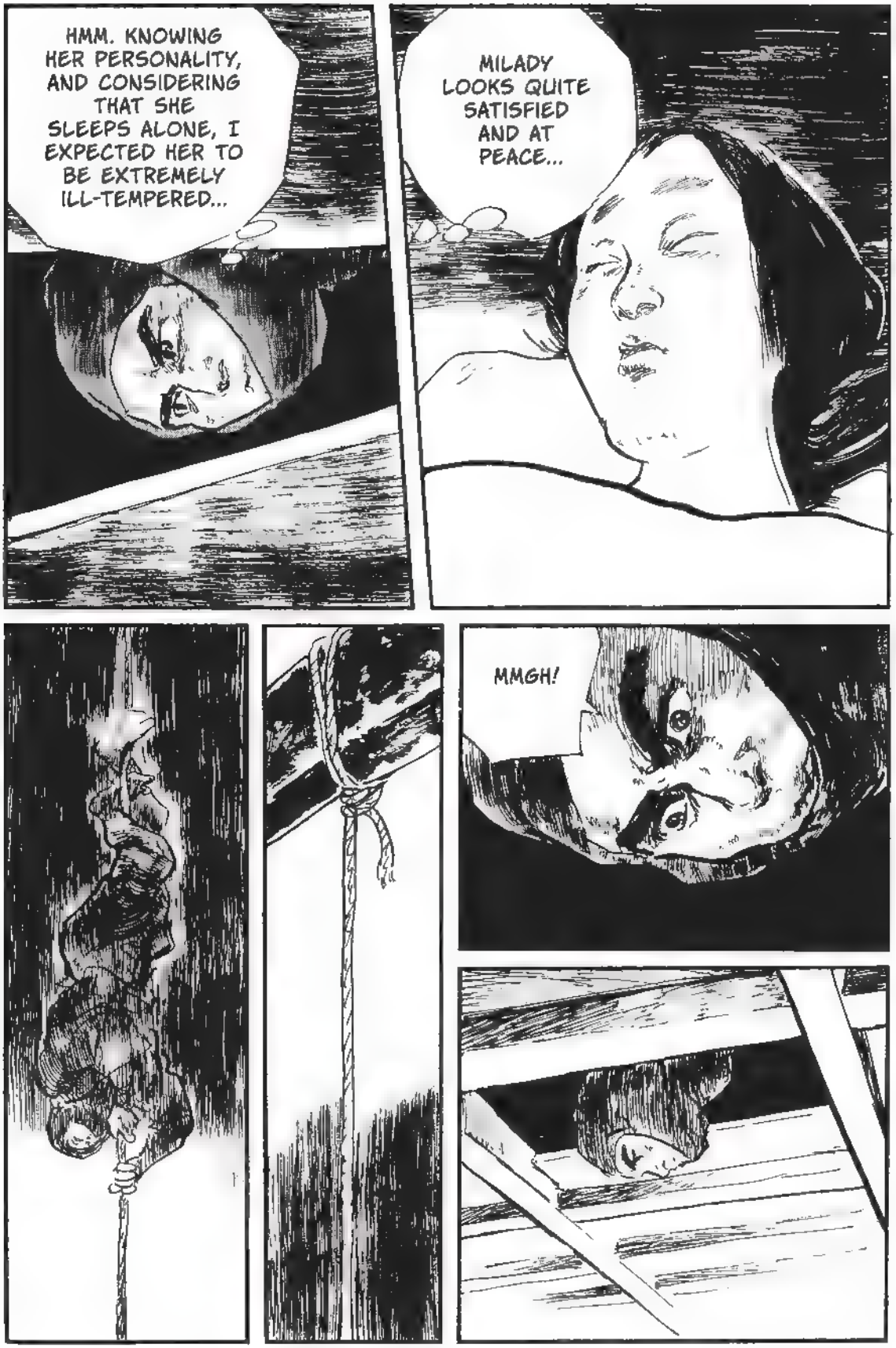
TSUKUMO, KIKKŌ, AND TSUKIBUE, MIX IN WITH MAIDSERVANTS...
DO NOT INFORM HIRAIWA-*DONO* EXACTLY WHAT WE'RE DOING.


YES!
...AS WE PLANNED.

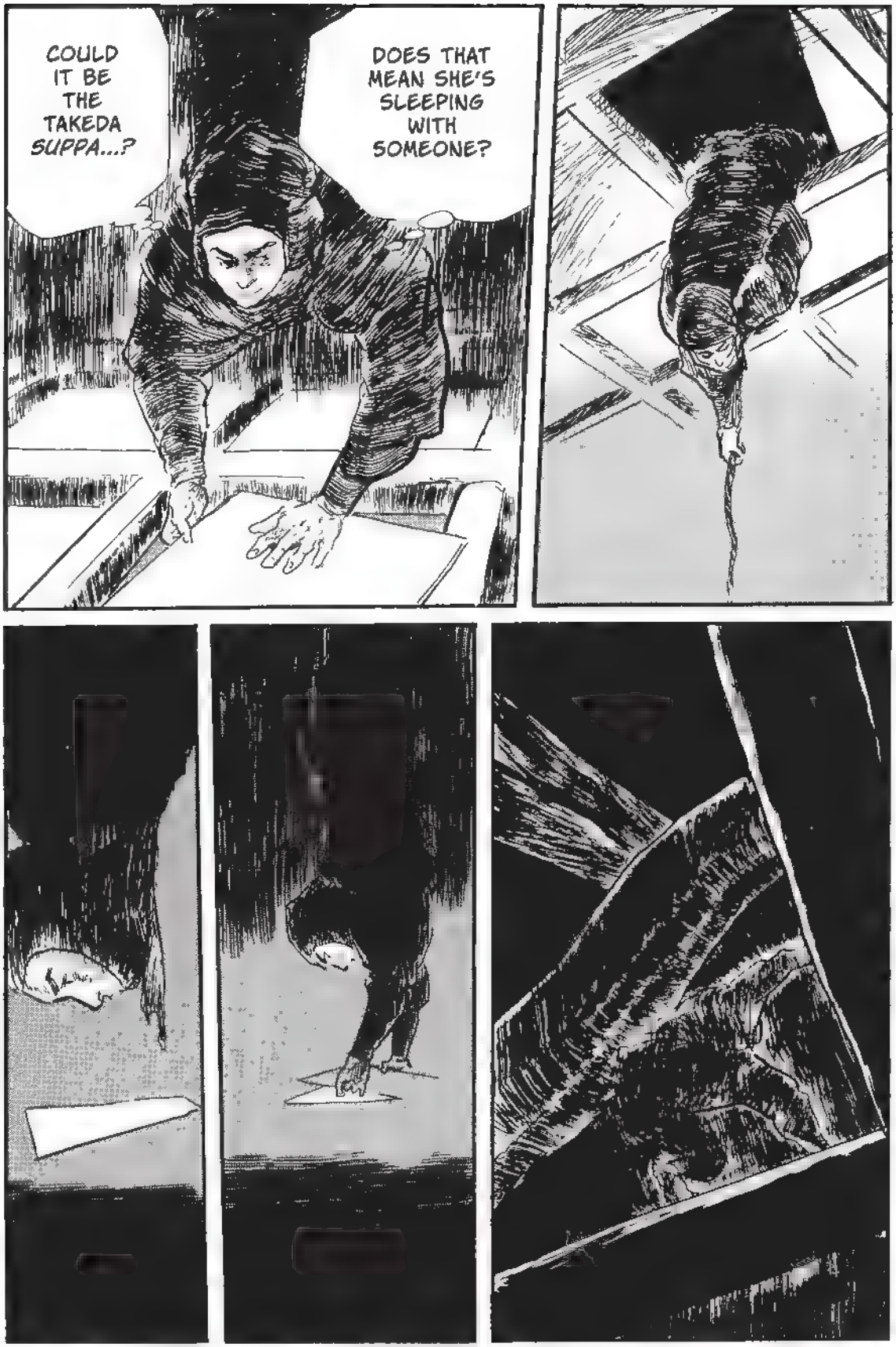

HANZŌ WAS NOT A TACTICIAN. HE WAS MERELY A *SUPPA* LEADER. IT WAS BEYOND HIM TO SEE THROUGH THE SCHEMES OF SASUKE AND KATSUYORI.

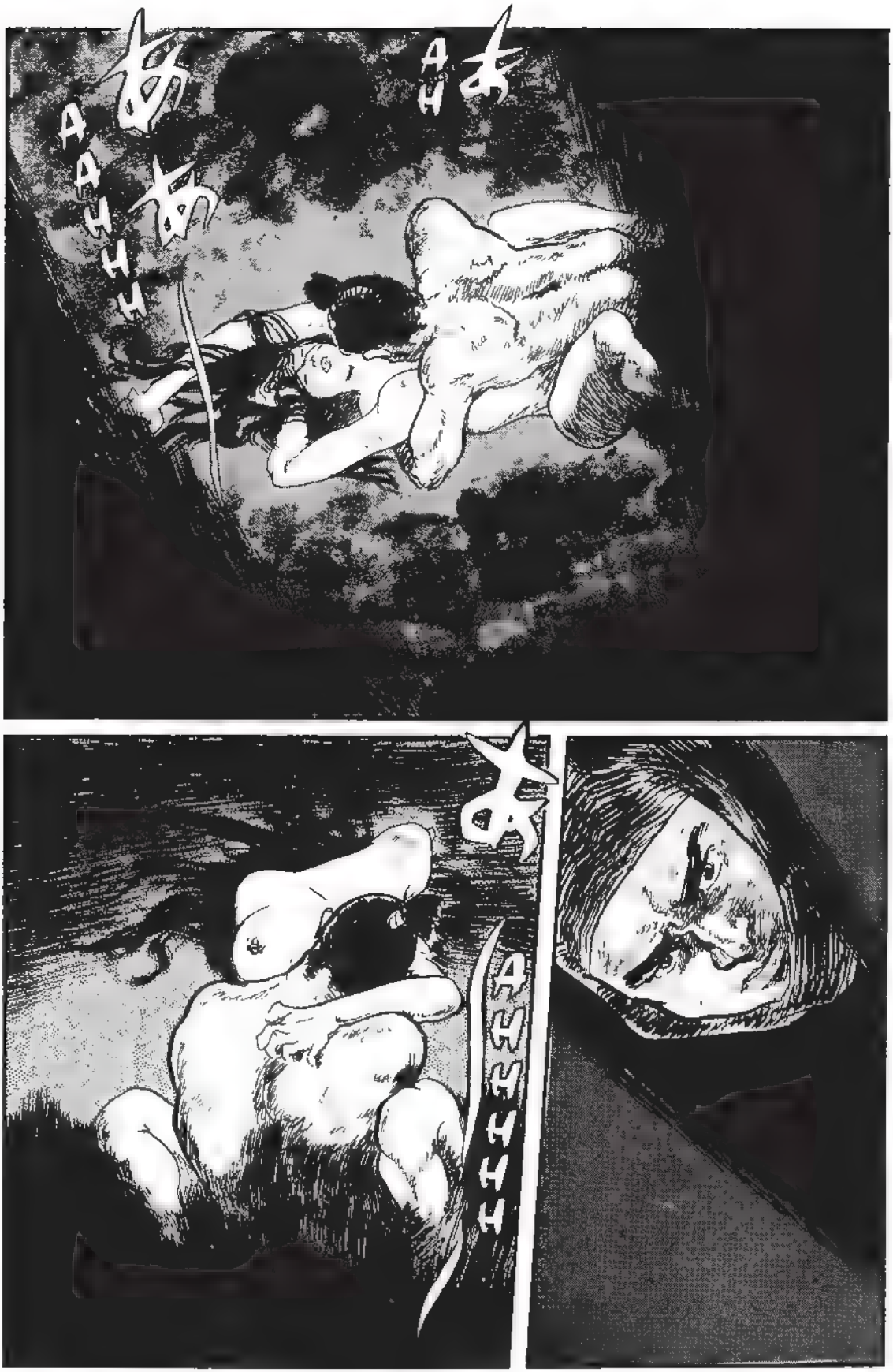

AS FAR AS TAKEDA WAS CONCERNED, GETTING ITOMARU INTO THE CASTLE WAS MORE THAN THEY HOPED FOR. AFTER ALL, THEY WERE DYING TO INFORM NOBUNAGA THAT TSUKIYAMA AND NOBUYASU HAD FORMED A LIAISON WITH TAKEDA.
IN NO WAY DID THEY WANT TO KILL ITOMARU. HANZŌ TOOK A FALSE STEP FROM THE START.




HMM. KNOWING HER PERSONALITY, AND CONSIDERING THAT SHE SLEEPS ALONE, I EXPECTED HER TO BE EXTREMELY ILL-TEMPERED...
MILADY LOOKS QUITE SATISFIED AND AT PEACE...
MMGH!

SOMEONE SUCKED AND LEFT A MARK...


COULD IT BE THE TAKEDA *SUPPA...?*
DOES THAT MEAN SHE'S SLEEPING WITH SOMEONE?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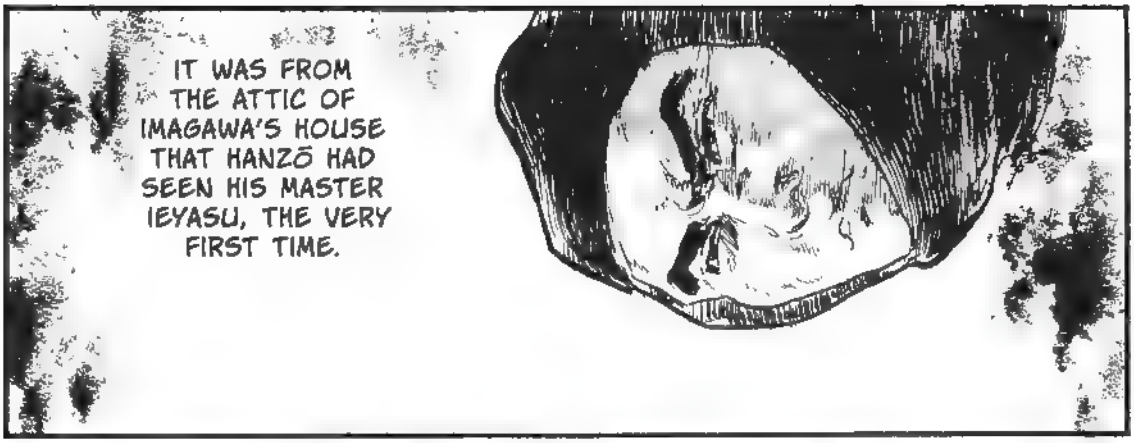
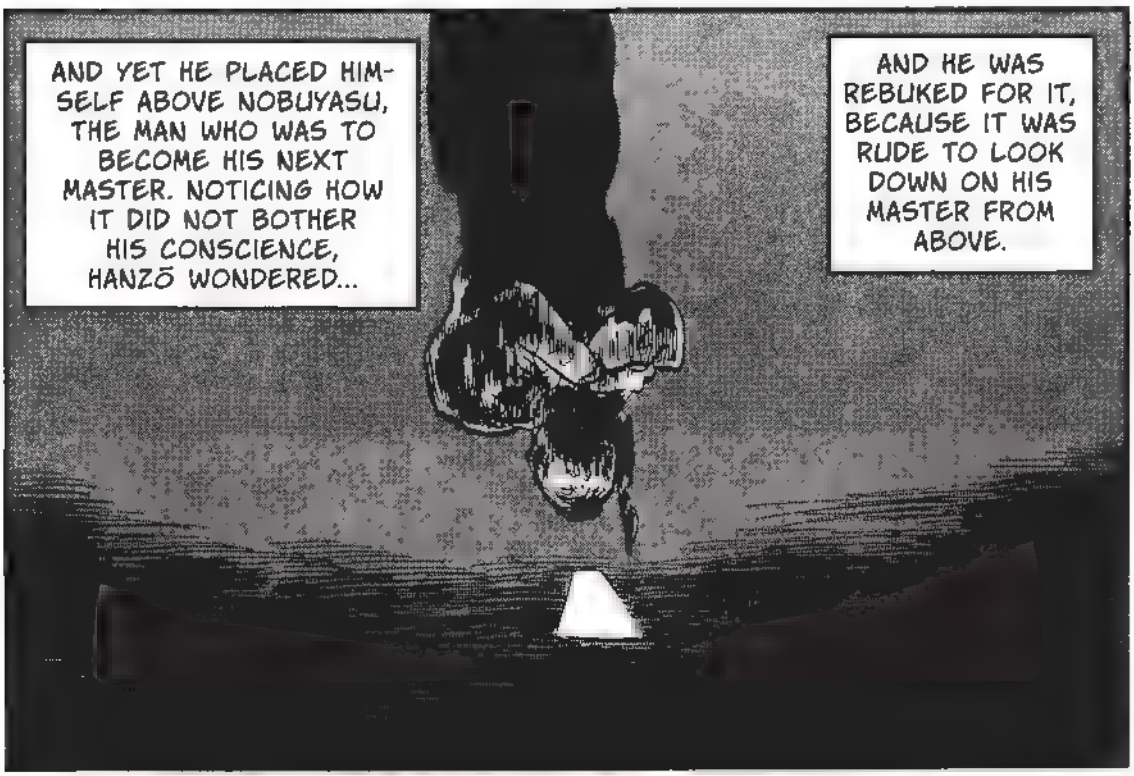
AHHHH


IT WAS FROM THE ATTIC OF IMAGAWA'S HOUSE THAT HANZŌ HAD SEEN HIS MASTER IEYASU, THE VERY FIRST TIME.


AND YET HE PLACED HIMSELF ABOVE NOBUYASU, THE MAN WHO WAS TO BECOME HIS NEXT MASTER. NOTICING HOW IT DID NOT BOTHER HIS CONSCIENCE, HANZŌ WONDERED...
AND HE WAS REBUKED FOR IT, BECAUSE IT WAS RUDE TO LOOK DOWN ON HIS MASTER FROM ABOVE.

IT MADE HIM SAD.
...IF THIS WAS BECAUSE NOBUYASU WAS NOT OF HIS MASTER'S BLOOD AFTER ALL.

BRING
TONG
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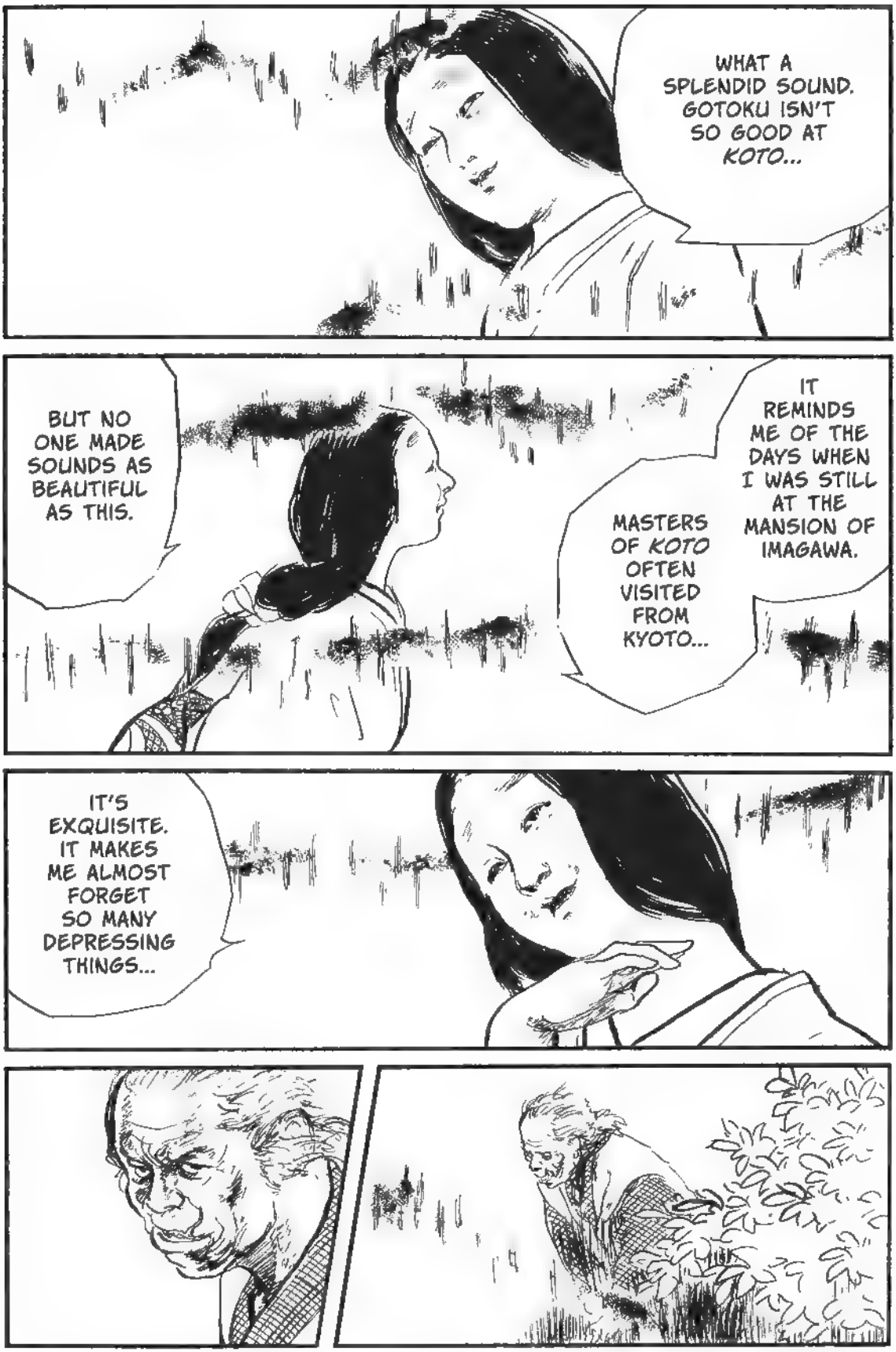
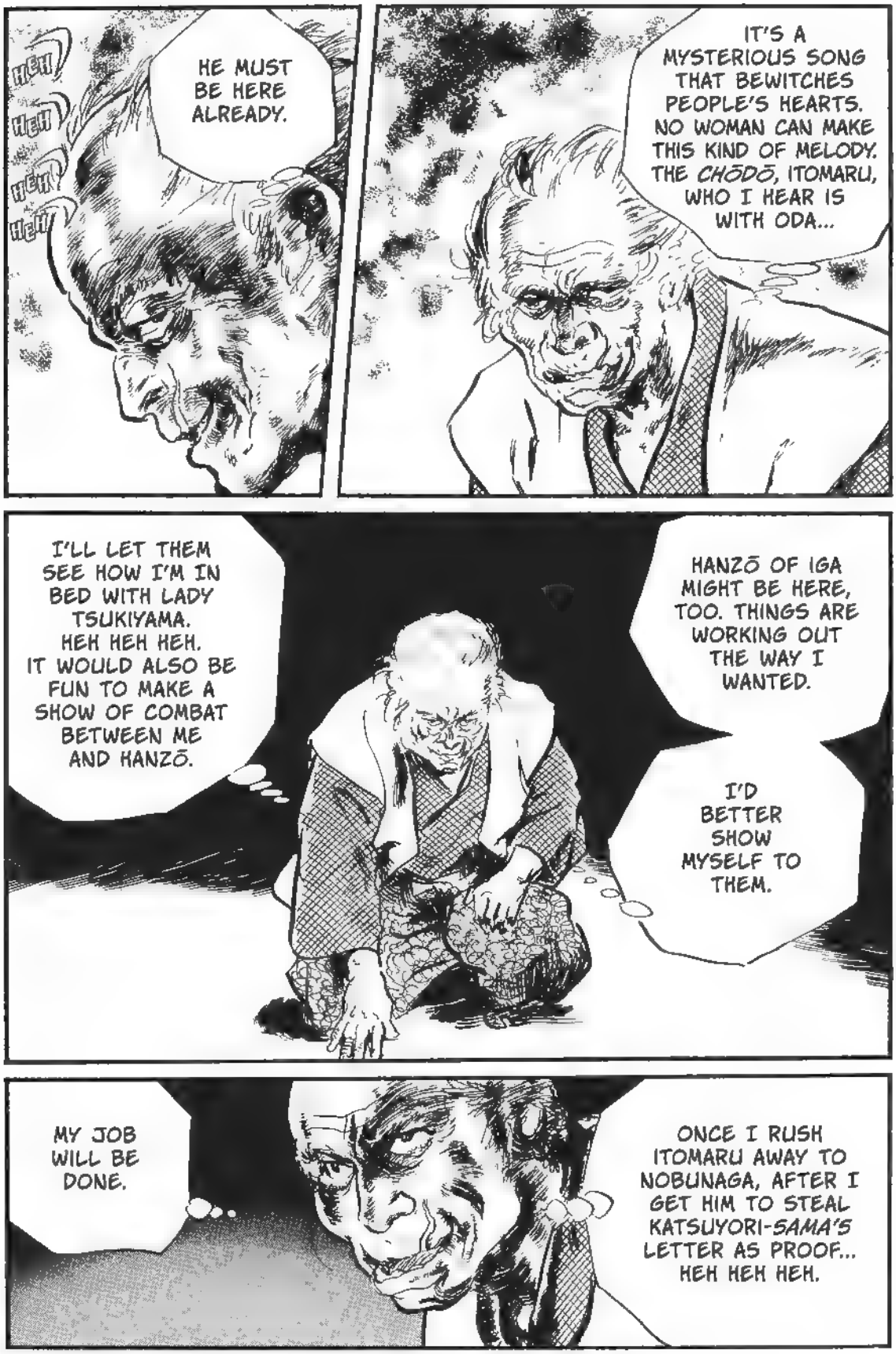
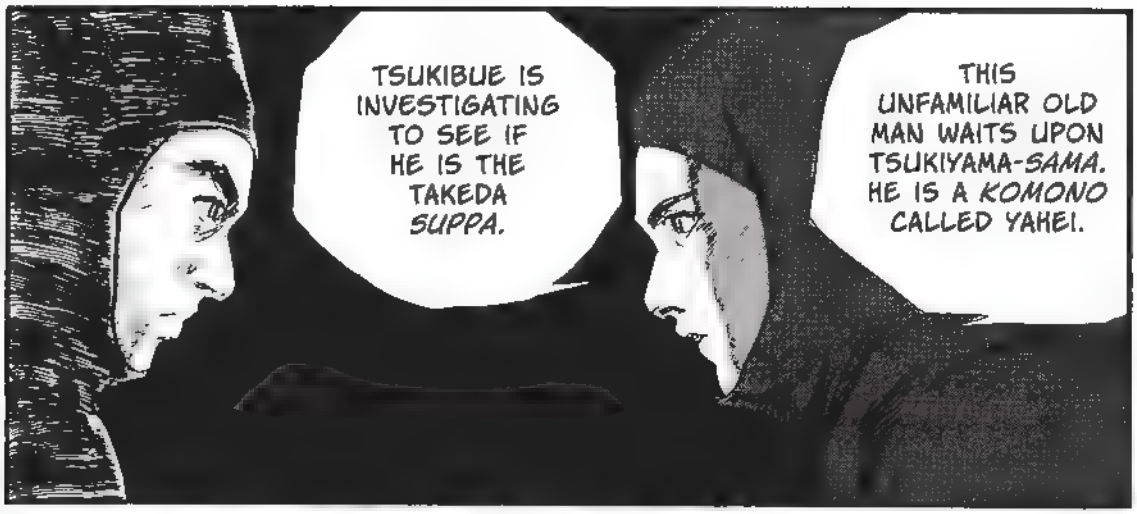
BRING

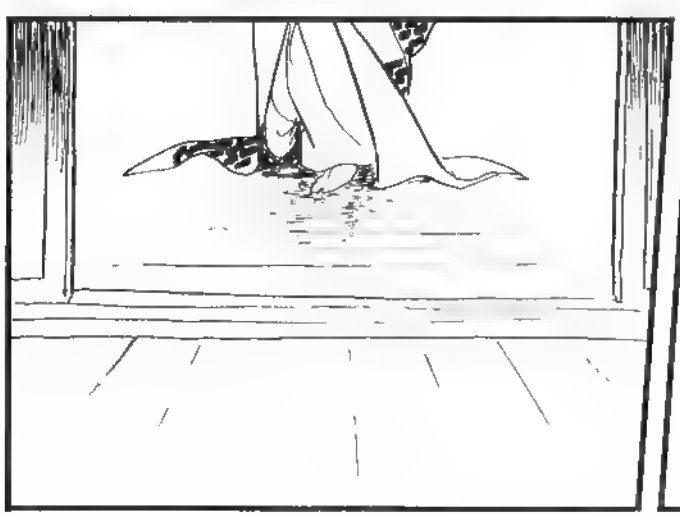

WHAT A SPLENDID SOUND. GOTOKU ISN'T SO GOOD AT *KOTO*...
BUT NO ONE MADE SOUNDS AS BEAUTIFUL AS THIS.
MASTERS OF *KOTO* OFTEN VISITED FROM KYOTO...
IT REMINDS ME OF THE DAYS WHEN I WAS STILL AT THE MANSION OF IMAGAWA.
IT'S EXQUISITE. IT MAKES ME ALMOST FORGET SO MANY DEPRESSING THINGS...


HE MUST BE HERE ALREADY.
HEH!
HEH!
HEH!
HEH!
IT'S A MYSTERIOUS SONG THAT BEWITCHES PEOPLE'S HEARTS. NO WOMAN CAN MAKE THIS KIND OF MELODY. THE CHŌDŌ, ITOMARU, WHO I HEAR IS WITH ODA...
I'LL LET THEM SEE HOW I'M IN BED WITH LADY TSUKIYAMA. HEH HEH HEH. IT WOULD ALSO BE FUN TO MAKE A SHOW OF COMBAT BETWEEN ME AND HANZŌ.
HANZŌ OF IGA MIGHT BE HERE, TOO. THINGS ARE WORKING OUT THE WAY I WANTED.
I'D BETTER SHOW MYSELF TO THEM.
MY JOB WILL BE DONE.
ONCE I RUSH ITOMARU AWAY TO NOBUNAGA, AFTER I GET HIM TO STEAL KATSUYORI-SAMA'S LETTER AS PROOF... HEH HEH HEH.

YES.
I WANT TO HEAR THE KOTO SOME MORE. WILL YOU SUMMON HER FROM GOTOKU'S PLACE?
MY NAME IS FUE.
WHO ARE YOU?
?!
THROUGH THE KIND OFFICES OF HIRAIWA-SAMA, I'VE COME TO WORK FOR YOU, BEGINNING YESTERDAY.

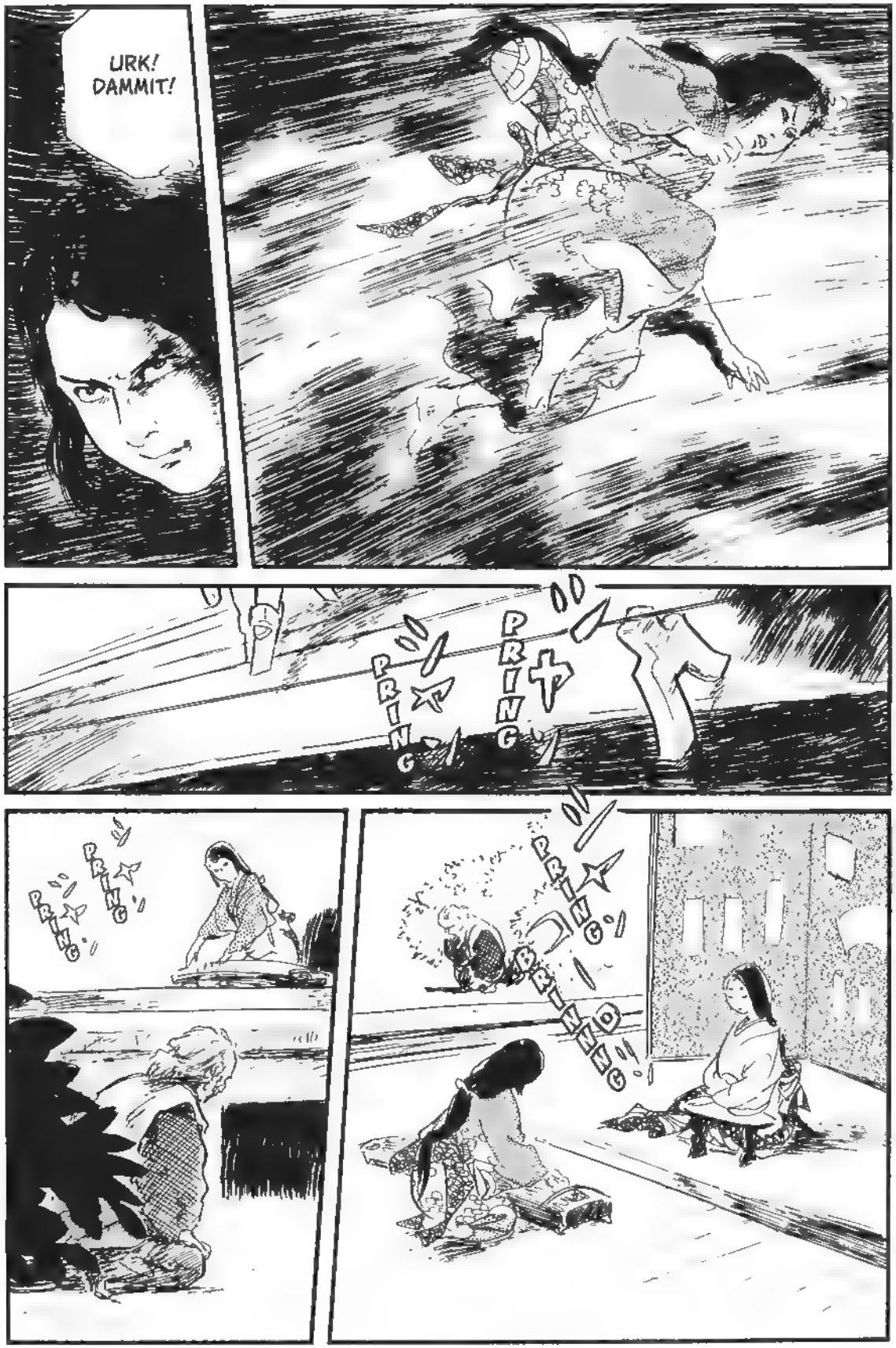
HM.
KIKKŌ SHOULD BE SERVING TEA SPIKED WITH *IBUKI BŌFŪ* SOON.
IS THIS CON-FIRMED?
THE *KOTO* PLAYER IS PROBABLY ITOMARU.


TSUKIBUE IS INVESTIGATING TO SEE IF HE IS THE TAKEDA *SUPPA.*
THIS UNFAMILIAR OLD MAN WAITS UPON TSUKIYAMA-*SAMA.* HE IS A *KOMONO* CALLED YAHEI.



THE KOTO SONGS YOU PLAYED MADE A DEEP IMPRESSION ON TSUKIYAMA-SAMA.
SHE ENTREATS YOU TO PLAY FOR HER.
HEH HEH HEH. SO THEY WANT ME TO DRINK IBUKI BŌFŪ AND CHECK IF I'M A MAN OR A WOMAN, EH?

I WON'T LET THEM.


URK!
DAMMIT!
PRING
PRING
PRING
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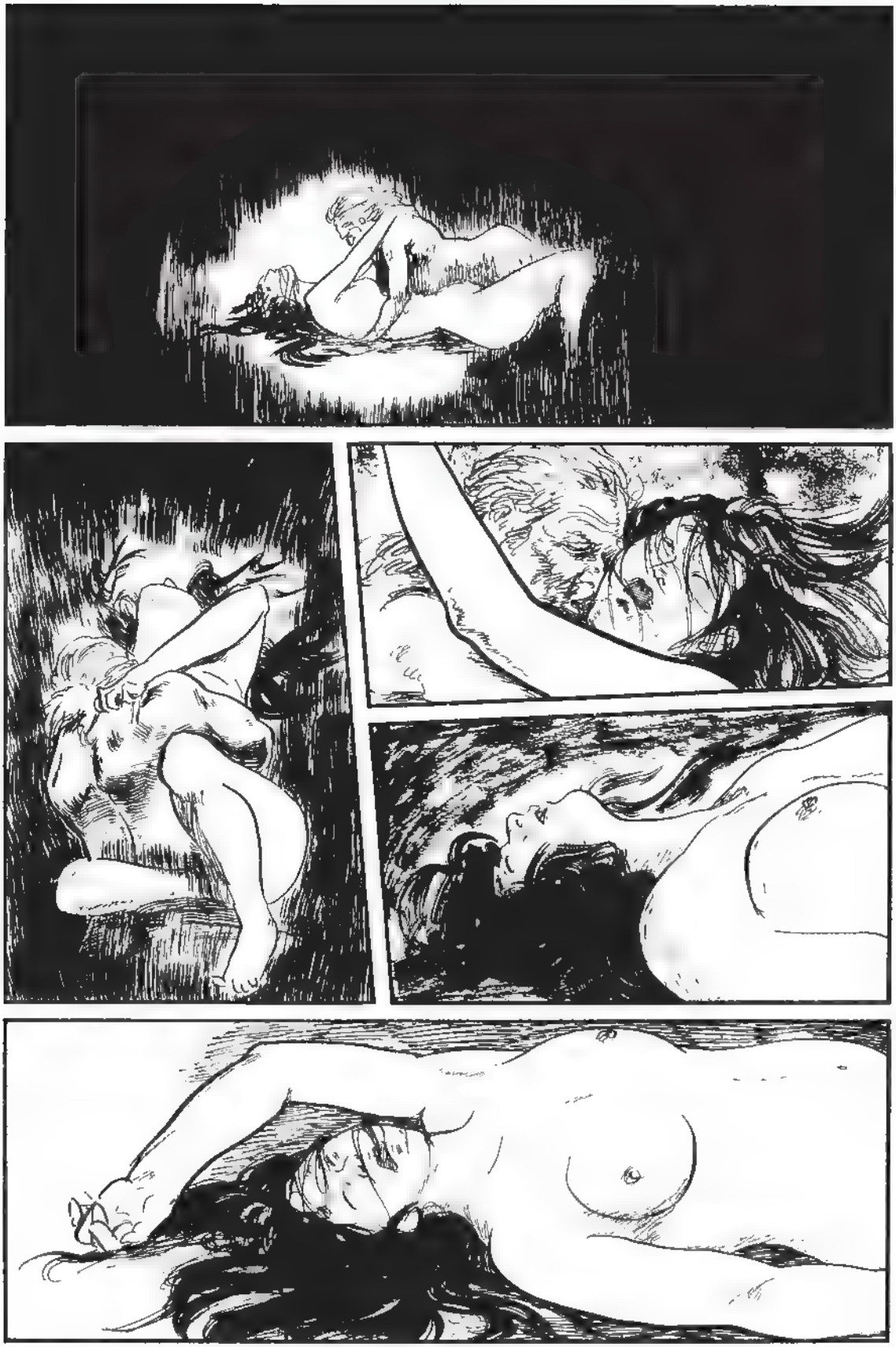
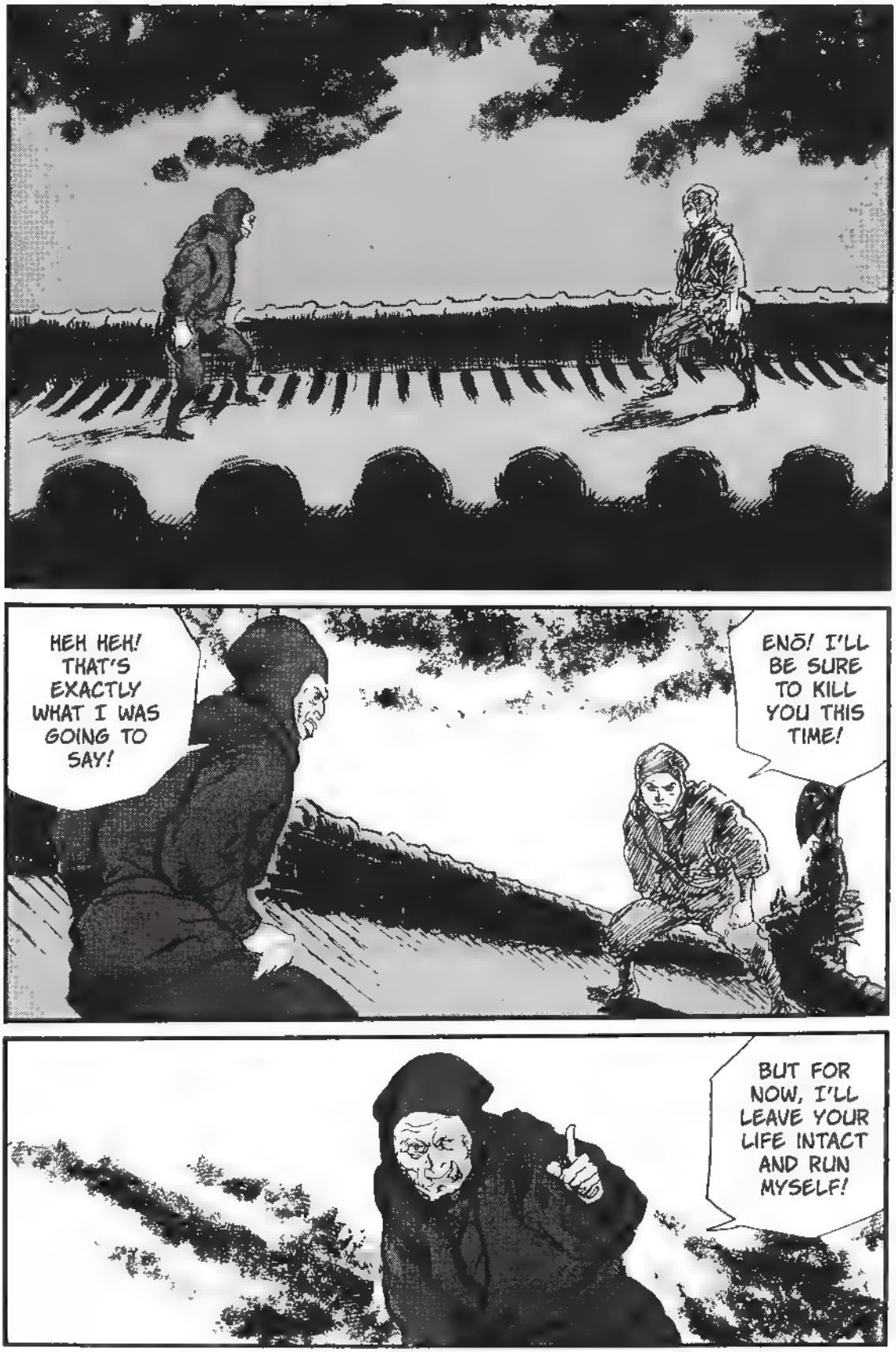
PRING



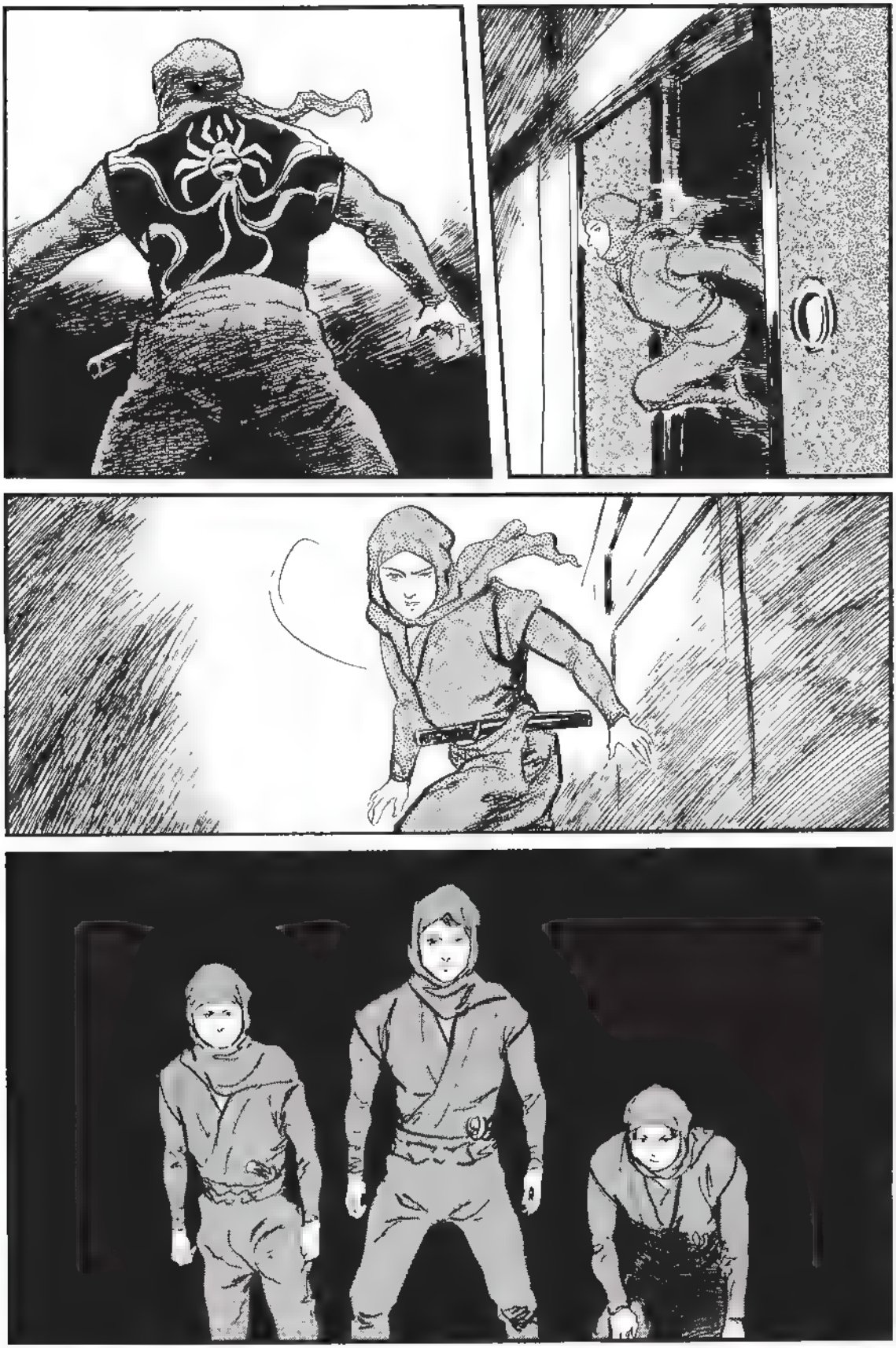
HM.

TŌMA ENŌ, YOU ARE THE TAKEDA SUPPA!
MMG!
HEH HEH HEH. IT'S BEEN SOME TIME SINCE WE LAST MET, HANZŌ.


HEH HEH! THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY!
ENŌ! I'LL BE SURE TO KILL YOU THIS TIME!
BUT FOR NOW, I'LL LEAVE YOUR LIFE INTACT AND RUN MYSELF!

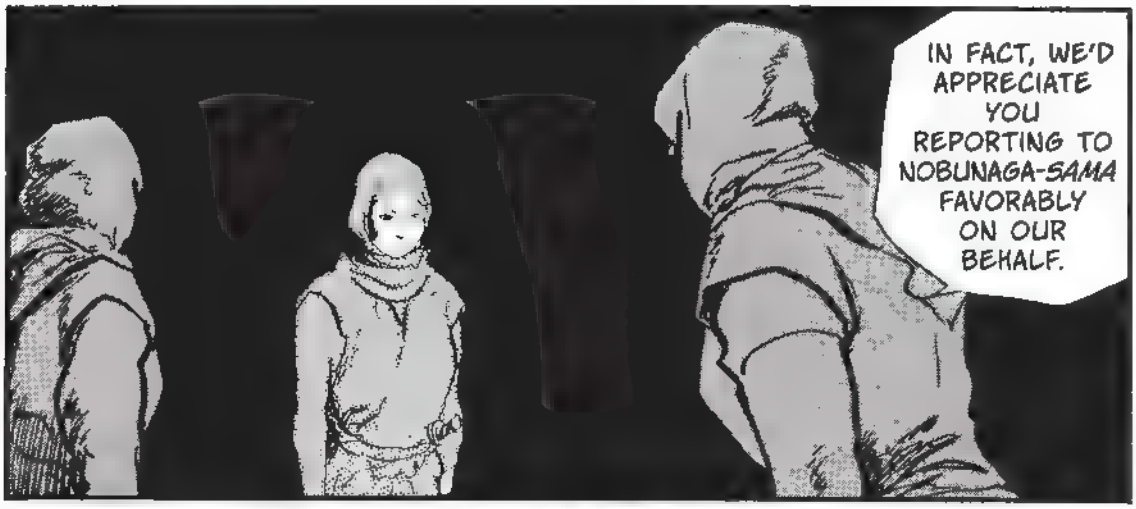
PYU
KLANG
I'VE GOT NO TIME TO WASTE WITH RIFFRAFF LIKE YOU.
I'M TOO BUSY WITH A GREAT PROJECT I TOOK ON! HEH HEH.
BUT SOMEDAY, I'LL BE SURE TO DESTROY YOU.

HEH HEH! A PISTOL AGAIN? YOU'RE AS FOUL AS EVER.
I'VE LAID EXPLOSIVES BELOW NOBUYASU'S SLEEPING CHAMBER.
LOOK, YOU CAN'T USE THE SAME TRICK TWICE.
A WOMAN I SENT IS READY TO IGNITE THE FUSE ANY TIME. NOBUYASU WILL BE BLOWN TO PIECES THE MOMENT YOU SHOOT.
SHOOT. WHY DON'T YOU, HANZŌ?

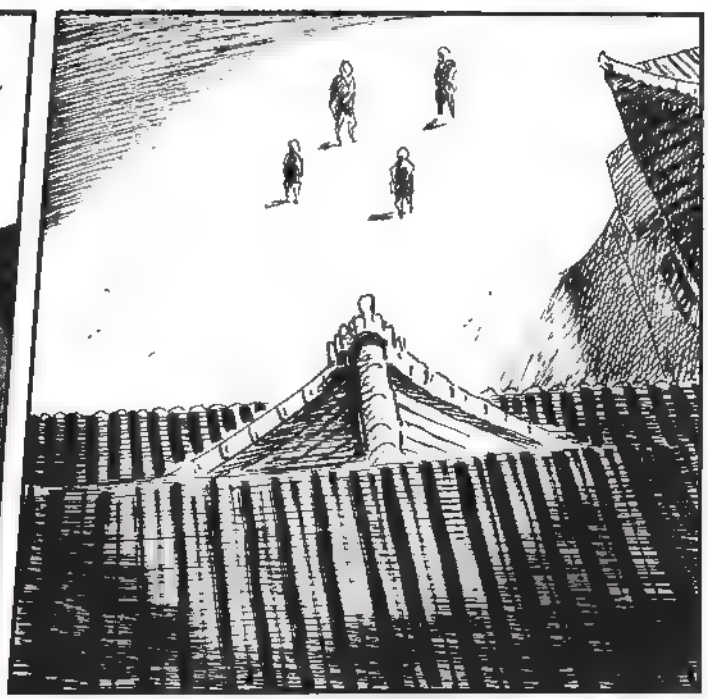


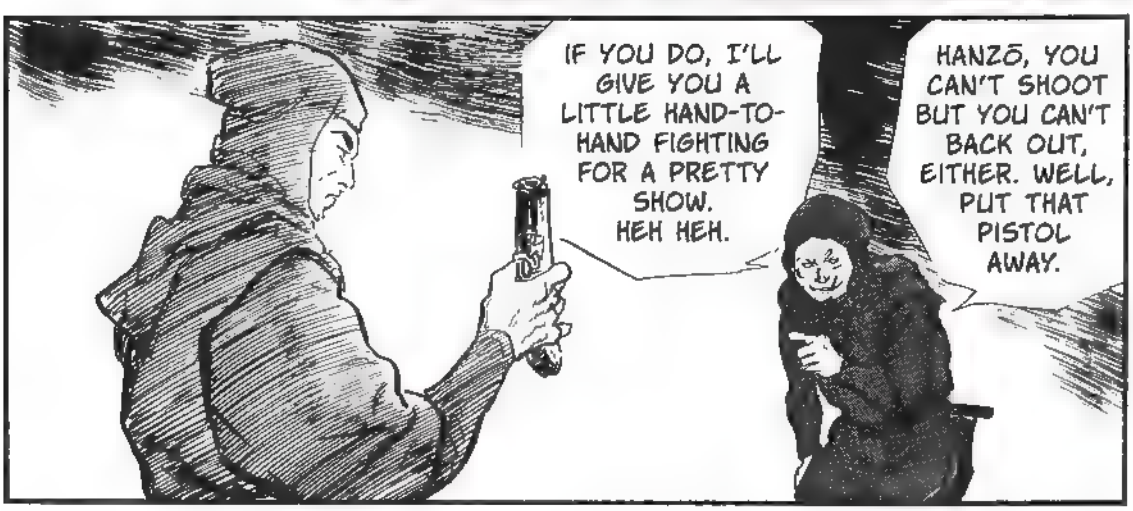
I BELIEVE YOU ARE ITOMARU-SAMA OF ODA.
AND TSUKI-BUE, ALSO HIS WIFE.
I AM KIKKŌ, ALSO HIS WIFE.
I AM TSUKUMO, HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI'S WIFE.
WE WEREN'T WAITING HERE TO FIGHT YOU.

WE ALREADY KNEW A TAKEDA SUPPA WAS IN THE CASTLE. WE'RE HUNTING HIM RIGHT NOW
A MERE TAKEDA SUPPA WILL BE FINISHED IN NO TIME
BE ASSURED! BOTH OKAZAKI AND HAMAMATSU ARE UNDER THE TIGHT SECURITY OF IGA HATTORI NOT EVEN A MOUSE CAN GET THROUGH

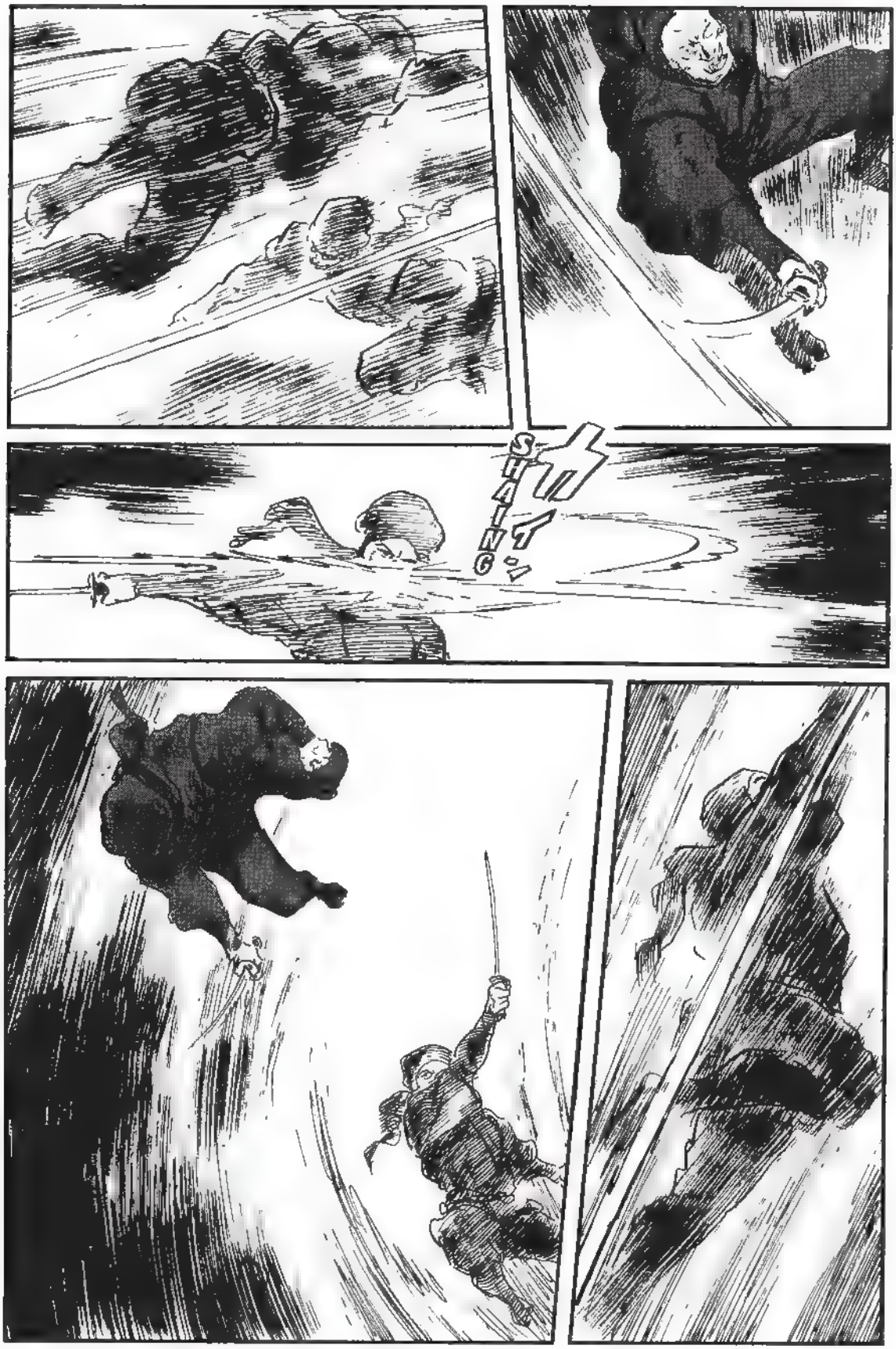

IN FACT, WE'D APPRECIATE YOU REPORTING TO NOBUNAGA-SAMA FAVORABLY ON OUR BEHALF.

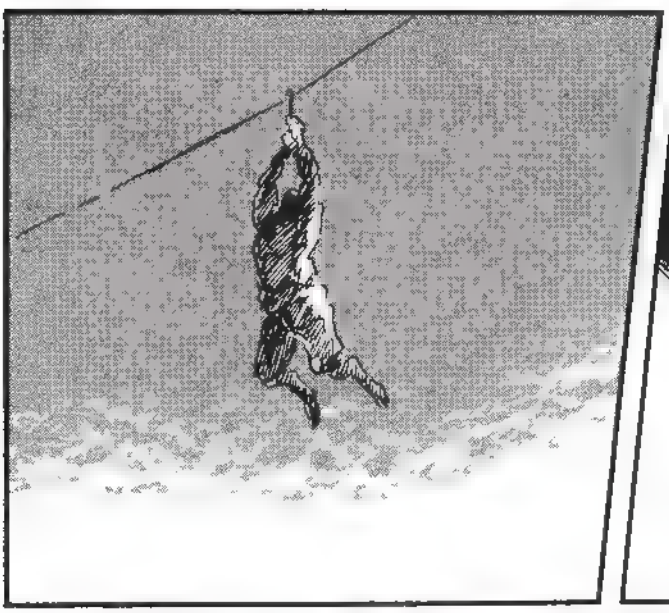
HO! IT LOOKS LIKE ALL THE PLAYERS ARE OUT.

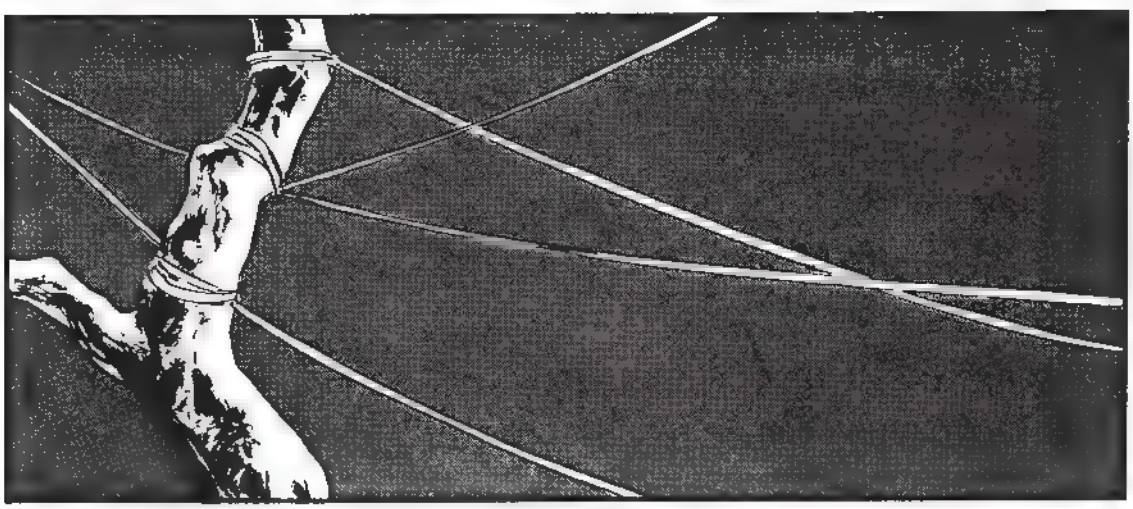



IF YOU DO, I'LL GIVE YOU A LITTLE HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING FOR A PRETTY SHOW. HEH HEH.
HANZŌ, YOU CAN'T SHOOT BUT YOU CAN'T BACK OUT, EITHER. WELL, PUT THAT PISTOL AWAY.

BYU
SHAT
TING
KLANG


SHAING!





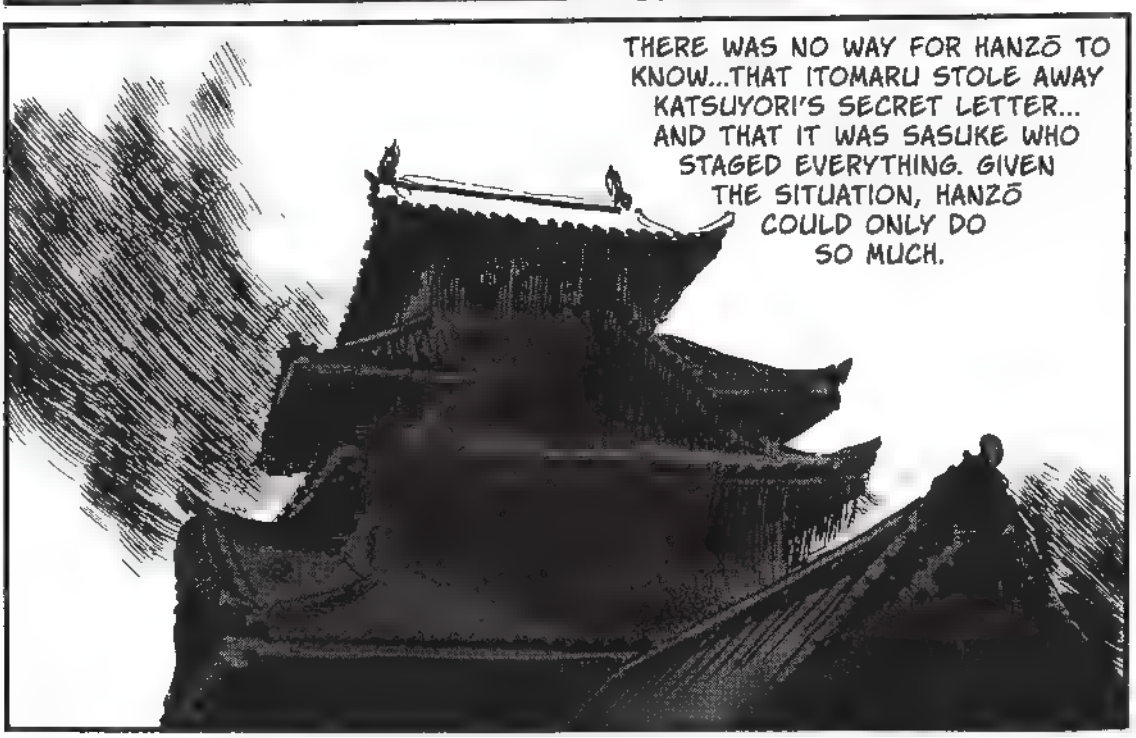
...AND FIGHT IT OUT ALL THE WAY.
WE'LL MEET AGAIN... AFTER TOKUGAWA AND ODA DISAPPEAR, AND THE FLAG OF *FŪRINKAZAN* WAVES ACROSS THE LAND. WE'LL TAKE OUR TIME...

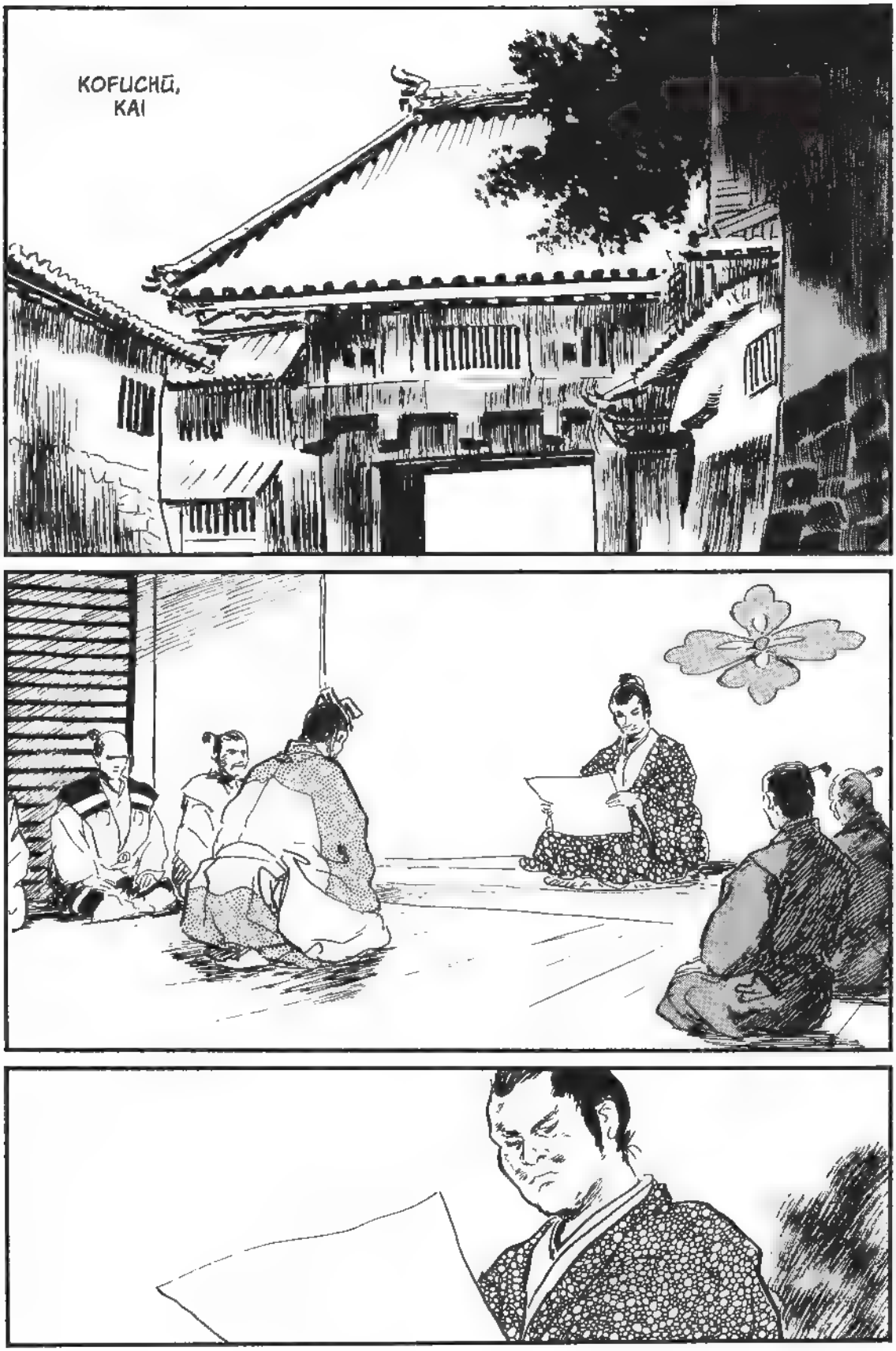
GET HIM!

I AM ITOMARU OF ODA.
I AM HANZŌ, THE BEST OF IGA.
I CAME AFTER RECEIVING A MESSAGE FROM GOTOKU-*HIME-SAMA* THAT SOMETHING STRANGE MIGHT BE HAPPENING WITHIN THE WALLS OF THIS CASTLE.
THIS IS AS I EXPECTED OF YOU, HATTORI HANZŌ-*DONO*.
EVEN IF WE FAIL TO KILL HIM, WE'LL MAKE SURE NO ONE CAN SNEAK IN AGAIN.

I WILL RETURN AND INFORM MILORD THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.
I'VE WITNESSED YOUR INCREDIBLE SECURITY, FROM WHICH NOT EVEN A BUG COULD ESCAPE.
DID WE GET THIS DONE RIGHT...?
...
...
FARE-WELL.
SO HE ESCAPED.
YES. I'M SORRY.

THE SHOWDOWN ENDED ALL TOO QUICKLY. THEY'D DONE ALL THEY COULD, THOUGHT HANZŌ. AND YET SOMEHOW HE FELT THINGS WEREN'T RIGHT...AND THIS UNSETTLED FEELING SPREAD WITHIN HIM AS IF THERE WERE STORM CLOUDS CLOAKING THE MOON.

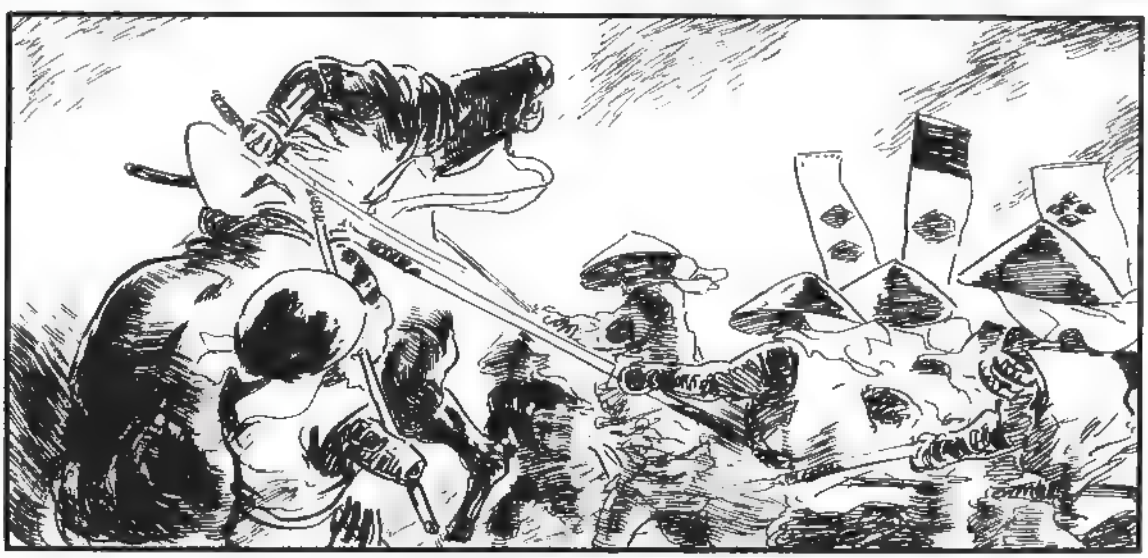

THERE WAS NO WAY FOR HANZŌ TO KNOW...THAT ITOMARU STOLE AWAY KATSUYORI'S SECRET LETTER... AND THAT IT WAS SASUKE WHO STAGED EVERYTHING. GIVEN THE SITUATION, HANZŌ COULD ONLY DO SO MUCH.

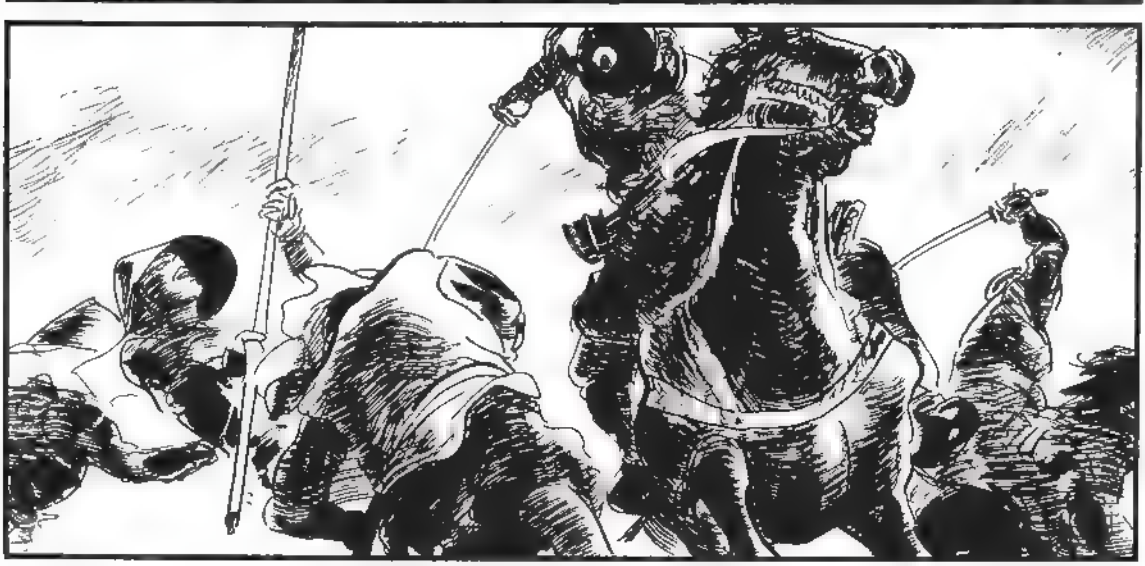

KOFUCHŪ,
KAI

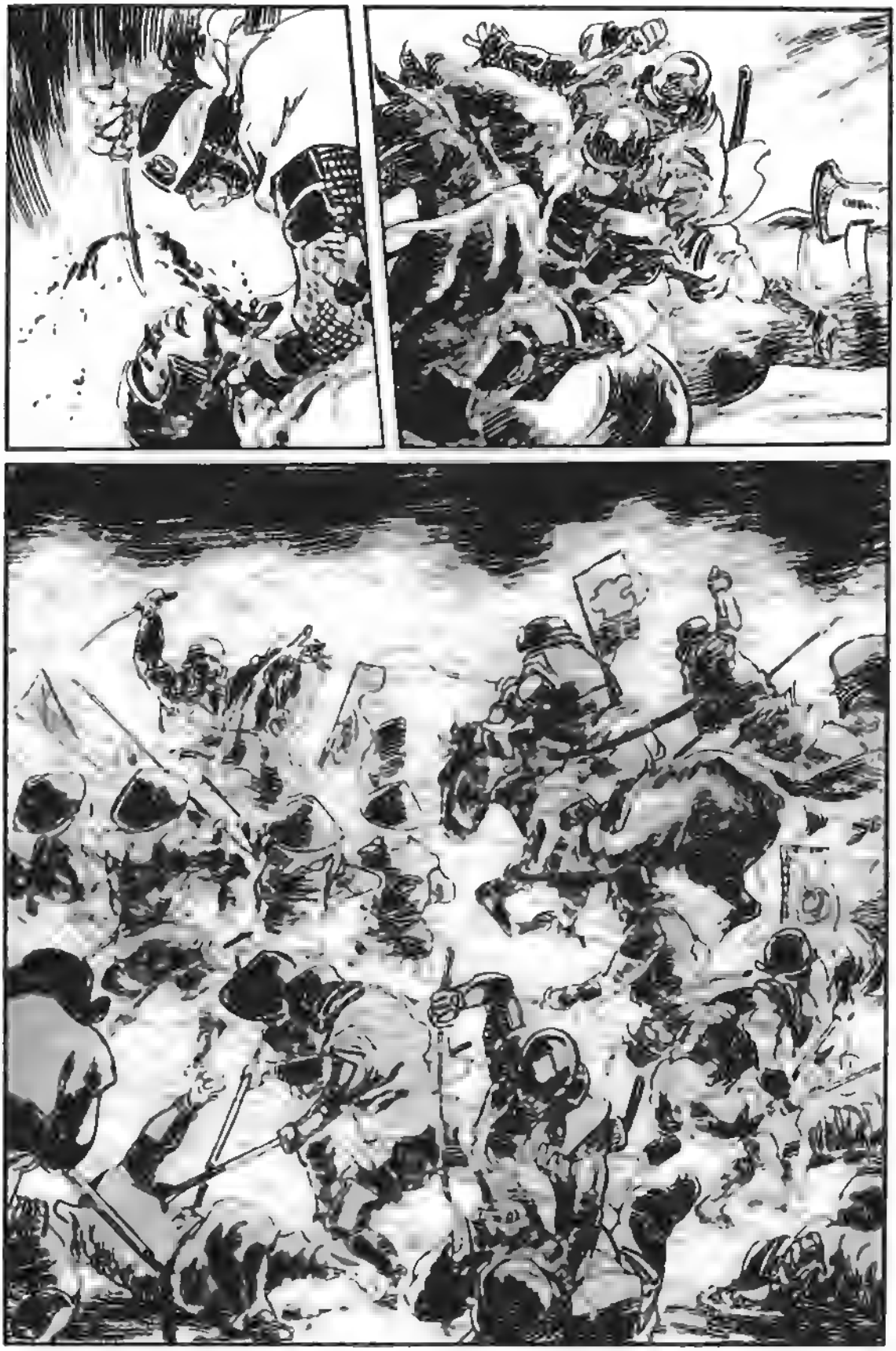
KATSUYORI-DONO, AS YOU CAN SEE FROM THE LETTER, YOSHIAKI-KŌ IS ANXIOUSLY WAITING FOR THE DAY WHEN YOU GO UP TO THE CAPITAL.
NOBUNAGA MADE YOSHIAKI-KŌ THE SHOGUN ONLY IN NAME AND A PUPPET IN REALITY-- AND AFTER NOBUNAGA TOOK FULL ADVANTAGE OF HIM, HE DROVE YOSHIAKI-KŌ OUT OF THE SHOGUN'S POST. YOU ARE NOW THE ONLY PERSON YOSHIAKI-KŌ CAN COUNT ON.
HE ENTREATS YOU TO FOLLOW THE LATE SHINGEN-SAMA'S INTENTIONS. RALLY YOUR ARMY TO THE WEST AND HELP HIM BECOME THE SHOGUN ONCE AGAIN.

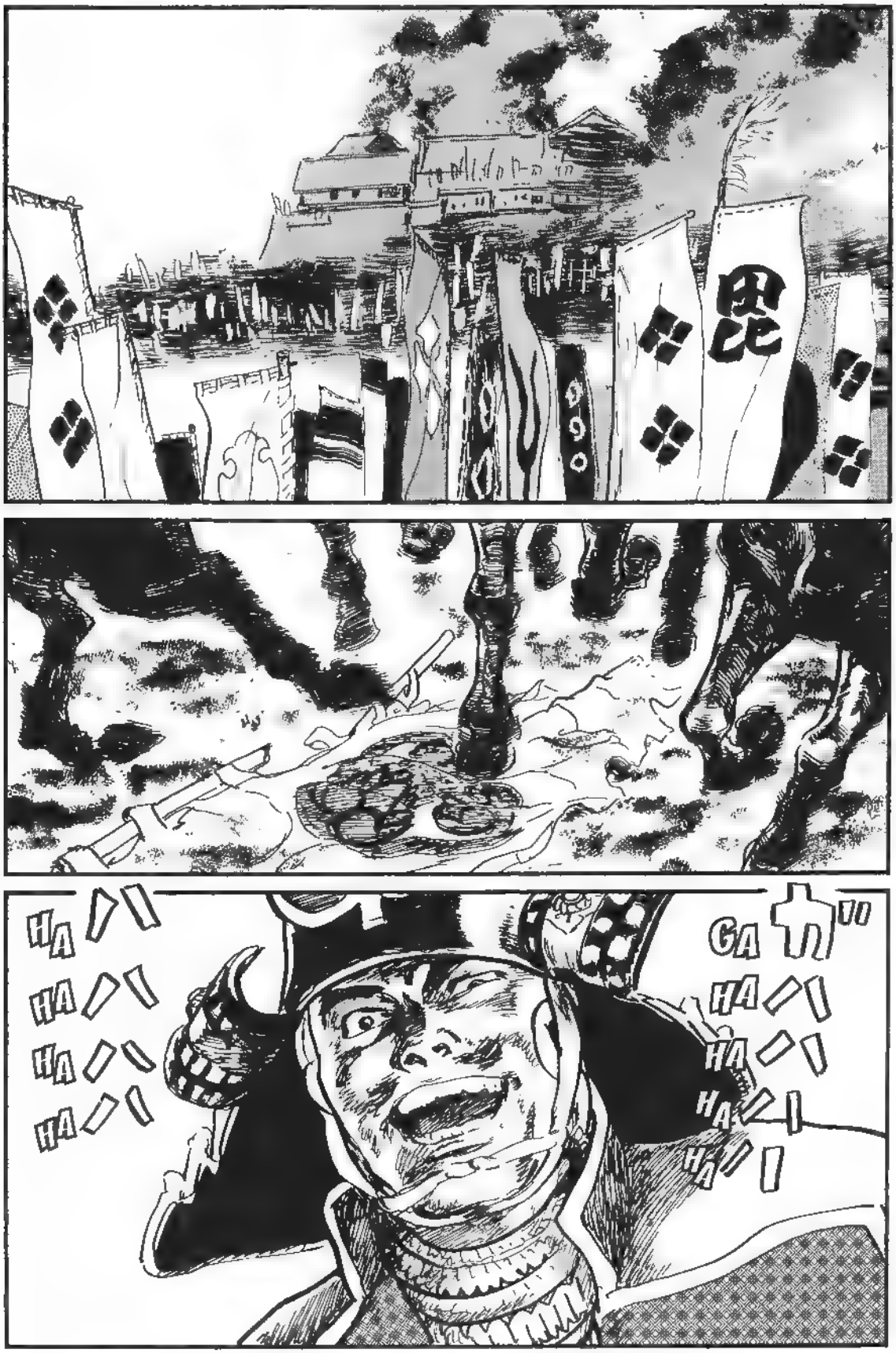
疾如風
徐如林
侵掠如火
不動如山

疾如風
徐如林
侵掠如火
不動如山
MOVE AS SWIFT AS A WIND, STAY AS SILENT AS A FOREST. ATTACK AS FIERCE AS FIRE, DEFEND AS UNMOVABLE AS A MOUNTAIN.





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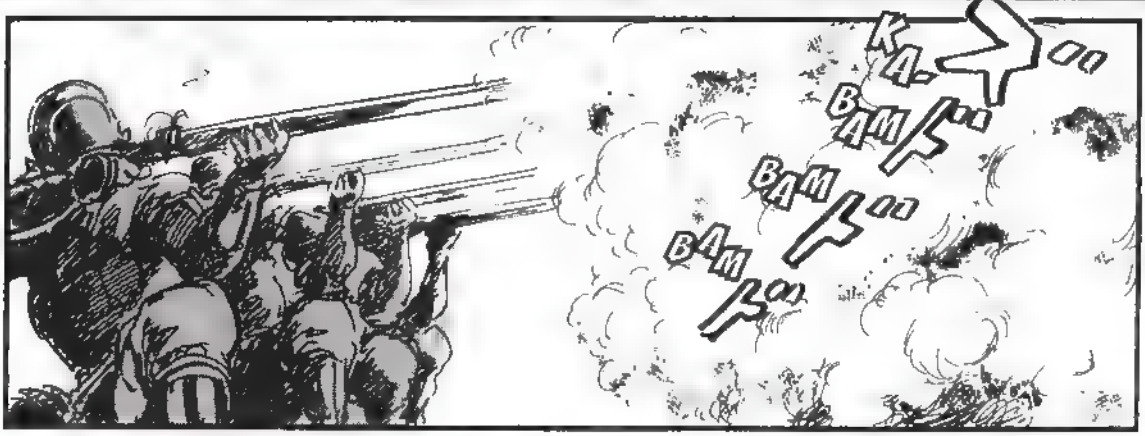

KA-
BAM
BAM
BAM

PLEASE HAVE THEM LEAVE.
LEAVE US.
YOU ARE AS CREEPY AS EVER.
IS THAT YOU, SASUKE?

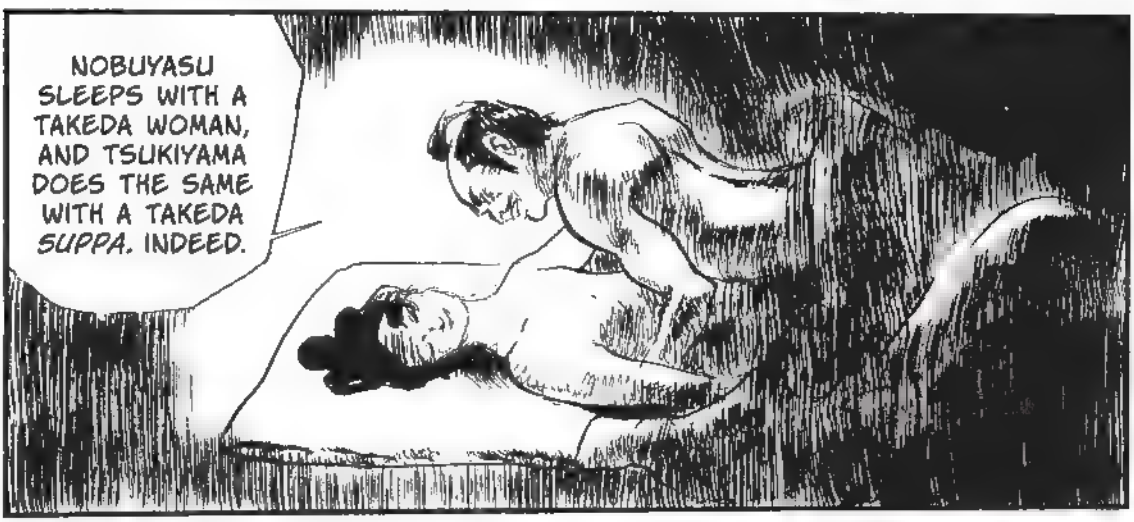
HA HA HA HA HA.
STARTING WITH AKECHI CASTLE, IT'S NINETEEN THIS MONTH ALONE!
SASUKE! HOW MANY TOKUGAWA CASTLES DO YOU THINK I'VE WON?
WHY SUCH HASTE? THE TIME IS NOT YET RIPE.
THEY ARE ALL SMALL CASTLES. GIVEN YOUR GREAT ARMY, IT WAS EASY, OF COURSE.
I NEVER EXPECTED IT WOULD BE THIS MUCH FUN! I SHOULD'VE STARTED MUCH SOONER! HA HA HA HA HA.
IT'S ONE OF THE FOOTHOLDS OF TOKUGAWA AND IT CONTROLS THE SOUTHERN REGION OF TŌTŌMI, WHICH MY FATHER, SHINGEN, COULD NOT EVEN CONQUER HIMSELF!
WHAT ABOUT TAKATENJIN CASTLE? WE'LL PROBABLY WIN THEIR SURRENDER BY TOMORROW.

I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU IT WASN'T A GOOD TIME TO TAKE ACTION RIGHT NOW. UNTIL WE STIR UP DISCORD BETWEEN ODA AND TOKUGAWA LIKE WE PLANNED, IT WON'T BE EFFECTIVE!
SINCE YOU'VE LOST NAGASHINO CASTLE, THAT MAKES THINGS EVEN.
BESIDES, THE MORE I FIGHT, THE MORE NOBUNAGA WILL DREAD MY ALLIANCE WITH NOBUYASU!
YOSHIAKI SENT ME A LETTER, URGING ME TO ADVANCE WEST. IN RESPONSE, I KNEW I HAD TO SHOW MY INTENT.
DON'T GIVE ME THAT LOOK! I'M DOING ALL THIS KNOWING I HAVE A STRONG CHANCE OF SUCCESS.
HE WON'T GO ANYWHERE NEAR THE TRAP WE LAID, DELAYING THE MATTER FOR A LATER TIME.
KATSUYORI-*SAMA*, IT'S AS SURE AS DEATH THAT THE MORE YOU RILE HIM, THE MORE NOBUNAGA WILL COUNT ON IEYASU.
WHAAT ?!
IT'S THE OPPOSITE.

IF YOU WIN THE FIGHT, THAT'S ONE THING... BUT IF YOU CAN'T... WELL, EVEN IF YOU COULD, ALL THE EFFORT WE'VE SPENT SCHEMING WILL BE WASTED.
IN FACT, HE'S LIKELY TO PUSH FOR ALL-OUT WAR AGAINST YOU, KATSUYORI-SAMA.
NOBUNAGA HAS TURNED A BLIND EYE TO NOBUYASU AND TSUKIYAMA ONLY BECAUSE HE CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE IEYASU TURN AGAINST HIM.
IT'S STUPID.
WHY DID I BOTHER TO GO TO OKAZAKI, SEDUCE TSUKIYAMA AND THEN SEND ITOMARU BACK WITH A FAKE LETTER? WHAT DID I BOTHER WITH THOSE THINGS FOR?
DON'T YOU DARE MOCK ME!
YOU FOOL!

HA HA HA HA HA.
YOU CAME SO CLOSE TO HOLDING THE COUNTRY IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.
TAKEDA KATSUYORI! YOU ARE INDEED A FEEBLEMINDED WARLORD AFTER ALL.

SO AS I SUSPECTED, TSUKIYAMA AND NOBUYASU HAVE A TACIT UNDERSTANDING WITH TAKEDA.


NOBUYASU SLEEPS WITH A TAKEDA WOMAN, AND TSUKIYAMA DOES THE SAME WITH A TAKEDA *SUPPA*. INDEED.

ONCE I DESTROY TAKEDA, I'LL DEAL WITH ALL THE REST.
I HAVE NO CHOICE EXCEPT TO LEAVE THEM ALONE.
BUT NOTHING CAN BE DONE ABOUT THAT FOR NOW.

GLOSSARY

ayashi/ayakashi
A mask used in *noh* theater that represents a vindictive or violent ghost, god, or powerful warrior.

chōdō
Boys or young men who had sexual relationships with powerful men during the samurai era.

fūrinkazan
Literally, "wind, forest, fire, and mountain." It was the battle flag used by Takeda Shingen, quoting *The Art of War*: "Move as swift as a wind, stay as silent as the forest, attack fierce like fire, unmovable defense like a mountain."

genpuku
A historical Japanese coming-of-age ceremony.

hime
Princess.

Hiraiwa Chikayoshi
(1542–1611) A trusted retainer under Tokugawa Ieyasu. It is known that Chikayoshi was a tutor to the eldest son of Ieyasu, Matsuraida Nobuyasu.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures.
sama – used for superiors. Sometimes spoken as *"saa."*
san – the most common, used among equals or near equals.

izuna
A foxlike familiar used in sorcery. Also worshiped as a nature god in Japan.

kagemusha
"Shadow warrior." A *kagemusha* was a doppelgänger used to protect important persons from assassination

kagura
A traditional style of music and dancing used in religious ceremonies.

koku
A unit of volume in Japan, equal to ten cubic *shaku*. Approximately 3.6 *koku* equal one cubic meter. The *koku* was originally defined as the quantity of rice required to feed one person for one year.

komono
One of the lowest positions within the samurai hierarchy, employed mostly for camp duties and as servants, rather than fighting men.

koto
A Japanese musical instrument similar to a zither.

kunoichi
Female ninja.

miko
Miko are young women in the service of Shinto shrines. They were mystics in Japan, going into trances and foretelling prophecies not unlike the Oracle at Delphi.

Nagashino Castle
A castle in Mikawa Province.

ozunu
A sorcerer who controlled familiar gods and demons.

saihai
Japanese war fan.

shinobi
Ninja.

Shugendo
An old Japanese way of studying the relationship between man and nature. *Shugendo* literally means "the path of training and testing."

shugenja
The seventh-century practitioners of the Japanese religion of Shugendo. They were sometimes known as *yamabushi*, variously rendered as "mountain warriors," "mountain hermits," "warrior priests," or "bandit monks."

suppa
Ninja.

Suwa Taisha
One of the oldest Shinto shrines in Japan.

Takatenjin Castle
A small, but strong, mountain castle, which used to stand in Shizuoka.

vilamba
Female demons that appear in the Dharani chapter, the twenty-sixth chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

Yamagata Masakage
A friend and vassal of Takeda Shingen, he was known for his red armor and battle skills.

yamaimo
Japanese mountain yam.

Zhuge, Liang
A noted strategist from the Three Kingdoms era in China.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including this related series, *Path of the Assassin*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.

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Path of the Assassin Vol. 14: Bad Blood
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Futamata Castle falls to the Takeda Army as they advance west—and at Mikatagahara, Ieyasu is handed a crushing defeat by Shingen. Meanwhile, Hanzō assassinates Shingen by exploiting his relationship with Tarōza, a woman who heads the Takeda *suppa*, thus saving Ieyasu at the last moment. But even so, a new battle begins against three court ladies. They are Izuna sorceresses, whom Takeda Katsuyori has unleashed.

For the last thirteen volumes, Hanzō's long walk down the tightrope of political intrigue and human melodrama has been bloody, dramatic, and awe inspiring, every page filled with the densely researched and poignant delivery you've come to expect from the godfathers of samurai manga. *Lone Wolf & Cub* creators Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima, experts of *gekiga* samurai manga, deliver the penultimate volume of *Path of the Assassin*.

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